

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

OPEN FORUM: LONGVIEW, TEXAS (AUGUST, 2002) Reaffirmation/Re-evaluation of Elders

Denny Petrillo, Maxie Boren, Tom Gaumer and a Letter to Petrillo from Gary Summers

Moderator:

Is it Scriptural to have a reaffirmation of the serving elders? If it is Scriptural, shouldn't the reaffirmation use the same authority outlined in Timothy and Titus as when they were installed as elders instead of popular vote? So what about the reaffirmation of elders?

Denny Petrillo:

I'm going to answer yes to that question. I do believe that it is a process that the church can enact. It's not that there's a book, chapter, and verse that we can turn to because there's not—just like there's not as far as the installation of elders to begin with. But we recognize in Acts chapter 20 that the Holy Spirit is the one that makes a man an elder. How does the Holy Spirit do that? The Holy Spirit does that by establishing the qualifications given in 1 Timothy three and Titus chapter one. And it is the church's responsibility to seek out and recognize those men who meet the qualifications that have been given by the Holy Spirit. Now, as time goes on, the possibility exists and probably all of us who have been in the church any time at all know that there are men who do not stay qualified. What is the responsibility of the church for a man who is no longer qualified? I believe that passage in 1 Timothy five that I was referring to just a minute ago is in fact talking about what to do when an elder is in sin, and there needs to be activity taken in regard to dealing with that man who is sinning. But what about a man who is no longer qualified to serve as an elder? Does the church have any kind of means at all in which to, as the body of Christ, address the problem of a man serving who is not qualified? And the reaffirmation process is one of those. It is still heavily Bible-

based. It's using the qualifications that had already been given and identifying a man that is already serving as an elder as no longer one who is qualified to serve. If the Holy Spirit made him an overseer, then the Holy Spirit can unmake him one, and the church is recognizing that particular process. So I would say yes. It's a matter of fact, the congregation where I come from in Bear Valley recently did this. We did have a reaffirmation form based upon the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

Maxie Boren:

I concur with Denny. I didn't know how he would respond to the question, but I thought he responded in a very good way. There are some things that are not addressed in the Bible in specific ways, and there are some things therefore left up to the realm of judgment as to how you handle a particular situation. Sometimes we might wish that every possibility of every possible circumstance or situation was addressed specifically, and then we wouldn't have to render any judgment at all.

Most of us choose not to use the term *reaffirmation* even though it really doesn't matter concerning the terminology. But if you have a situation arise in a particular congregation that is impossible to deal with, and you search the Scriptures through, and you find nothing that gives you a definite procedure to follow, then I think you do have to use good judgment in how to handle that situation. There is nothing in the New Testament that I know of that says, "Once an elder, always an elder regardless". Man can disqualify himself. A preacher can disqualify himself. I've known preachers who've completely

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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Editorial...

AGNOSTICISM & FELLOWSHIP

In the mid-1980's the late Hugo McCord spoke on the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures. At the time bro. Curtis Cates had not been long the Director of the MSOP. In his lectures brother McCord taught more than once that the only way man could have certain knowledge was through empirical evidence (evidence attained through man's five senses). Thus, since God cannot be observed through the five senses, man cannot know that God exists. Therefore, faith in God is not built upon certain knowledge, but at best a high degree of probability. This kind of thinking has led many to what is called "the leap of faith" and uncertainty about anything in the spiritual realm. They say there is not enough evidence anywhere to conclusively and absolutely prove the existence of God, but there is enough evidence to *assume* that God exists. Therefore, they teach it is more reasonable to have faith in God than to have faith in the non-existence of God. This is a form of agnosticism. Moreover, it is a type of hypocrisy because those who believe such a thing live as if they are certain about spiritual things, but in reality they are not. Further, they are lying every time they sing such spiritual songs as "Blessed Assurance Jesus is Mine." This is the case because, according to this view, there is not enough evidence available for anyone to conclude absolutely that God exists or there is a spiritual realm. Hence, they arrive at the erroneous position that if Christianity can be proved, there is no reason for faith. This false concept led Cates to warn McCord that if he persisted in advocating such he would have to leave the lectures.

Recently we heard bro. Larry Powers (he is not alone in advocating this), the preacher for the Sharon, TN Church of Christ, graduate of MSOP and former President of the MSOP Alumni Association, advocate an agnostic position without realizing it. In Larry's case it had to do with fellowship among and between brethren. It all begins with 2 John 9-11, the understanding of it and its application. The verses read:

Whoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

The *whole* or *perfect* (complete) doctrine of Christ (Acts 20:27; James 1:25) is made up of many component parts or constituent elements. Violate, transgress, go beyond, or fall short of, any one of these parts necessary to man's salvation (obligatory parts or elements) and one ceases to have God. However, for one to abide in the doctrine of Christ means that one is living in subjection

to every component part of the doctrine of Christ necessary for man's salvation—whatever a person believes and does he must have the authority of Christ for it (Col. 3:17). This is the *only* way one can “**walk by faith and not by sight**” (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God and without a living (obedient) faith it is impossible to please Him (Rom. 10:17; James 2:14-26; Heb. 11:6; 5:8, 9; John 14:15). Thus, in order to enjoy the fellowship about which John writes, all must be of the same mind and the same judgement regarding every component part of the doctrine of Christ that man is obligated to do in order to be saved and remain saved (1 Cor. 1:10; 15:58; Rev. 2:10; John 12:48). Thus, to depart from the doctrine of Christ is to lose God in doing it.

Further, John declares “**If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.**” If anyone comes to us with any part of or the whole of the doctrine of Christ altered, we are forbidden from having any association with him that could be construed by anyone anywhere that we are in fellowship with such a person. Any association with a false teacher that indicates support for him puts us into the same position with God that he occupies—we too are without God.

Powers stated that he did not know where to draw the line in applying 2 John 9-11. And, he does not think anyone can know the line God has already drawn (*This is his agnostic view of 2 John 9-11*).

Please consider the following story. Let us suppose Diotrophes was speaking on a lecturship where the apostle Paul was also a speaker, but Paul made no effort to rebuke and correct him. In a second lecturship Peter and Paul were speakers, but Peter did nothing to correct Paul for his failure to rebuke and correct Diotrophes. In a third lecturship John and Peter are speakers, but John does not rebuke and correct Peter because the latter refused to withstand Paul to the face because he failed to confront Diotrophes. Would Mark be sinning if he did not rebuke and correct John because he did not attempt to correct Peter who failed to confront Paul for his failure to rebuke Diotrophes? For some strange reason this scenario poses a problem for Powers, MSOP and others. Does Paul's failure to confront Diotrophes for his sins excuse Peter from his obligations to withstand Paul to the face because he stood condemned in our story? Does Peter's failure to comply with God's Will pertaining to Paul's public sin excuse John from his obligation to rebuke Peter? And, is Mark excused from his God assigned obligations to confront those in error because these apostles were derelict in their duty to expose the public sins of erring brethren?

There are no degrees of fellowship such as “Big ‘F’, little ‘f’ fellowship” in the previous story. Any person whose actions bid God speed to an “altered gospel” preacher is as guilty as the person who preaches the

“altered gospel” (Gal. 1:6-9). Thus, in our story Paul, Peter, John, and if Mark followed the bad example of these apostles, all would be as guilty before God as Diotrophes. If not, pray tell why not?

Powers, and other brethren need to give some serious unbiased study of the Biblical doctrine of Christian fellowship. If they had an accurate knowledge of Biblical fellowship, they would know that simply being in the same religious meeting place with a person(s) does not in and of itself alone, with all other things being scripturally equal, constitute the fellowship of which John wrote in 1 John 1:1-4. What about religious debate gatherings? What about the debate Paul and Barnabas had with the Judaizing teachers in the church at Antioch of Syria? What about “Open Forums”? Are all who are in attendance in such religious gatherings in fellowship with God and one another simply by their presence in them? What about our regular first day of the week worship assemblies, Gospel meetings, etc.? Merely being in such an assembly does not in and of itself alone, with all other things being Scripturally equal, constitute being in fellowship with everyone therein. *But, when one reads that Garland Elkins, Robert Taylor, Curtis Cates, Bobby Liddell, et. al., are on a lecturship with Dave Miller, what message does it send to the church?* Especially since Elkins and Taylor are on public record, saying that Miller's R&R doctrine is false. And, according to Powers, no one at MSOP believes Miller's errors. Nevertheless, Elkins, Taylor, Cates, Liddell and the other speakers on such a lecturship have not exposed Miller's errors, rebuked him to his face and called on him to repent. To the contrary, they will continue to praise and encourage Miller in his errors, thereby bidding him God speed. Thus, they are partakers of his evil deeds. That is what the apostle John taught, whether anyone believes it or not, Powers and friends notwithstanding.

—David P. Brown, Editor

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defaulted either in doctrine or in moral living, and therefore they no longer should be in the pulpit. And I know of men that have become elders that disqualify themselves.

Let me give you a couple of examples. In 1 Timothy chapter three and verse three, where Paul gave the qualifications of the elders, two of those were these: the elder is to be gentle, and the elder is to be not contentious. And then Titus chapter one and verse seven we have some more information given. The bishop must be blameless; he must not be self-willed; he must not be soon angry, and etc. Well, what if a man, when he was selected as an elder, gave every appearance of not being a man of anger, not being a man that was contentious, and not being a man that was self-willed, but then after he was placed in the position of being an elder, he begins to manifest those characteristics. It seems to me that the passages that qualify a man to become an elder would also disqualify a man who does not live his life in keeping with those things.

So the question then arises, “What are we going to do about a man or men that get themselves into the position of elders and hold the church back and hurt the cause of Christ immeasurably?” Are we just going to sit back and tolerate that and tolerate that? I’ve known of congregations that were completely hamstrung by disqualified elderships. And brethren refusing to do anything about it and therefore as a result years and years went by when the church was stymied and could not do anything that was progressive as far as winning souls are concerned. I’m not talking about progressive liberal doctrine; so please don’t misconstrue what I’m saying.

I knew of a situation up in Oklahoma where a man literally owned the property upon which the church building sat and had paid for most of the building, and the building and the property was in his name. And he ran that church with an iron hand. For an example, he felt that the only Scriptural way to pray was to stand up. And for twenty years that congregation stood up for every prayer that was offered there—not because the Bible tells us to do that—but because he said that’s what we’re to do. He’d bound where God had not bound; often times he loosed where God had bound. He had a terrible reputation in the community, and the church was stymied. People, when I first went there, instead of introducing me as the preacher of the church of Christ, they would say, “He’s the preacher at...” and name this man’s name as his church. And it was that bad. Well, finally, finally, the brethren had enough of it. And they wrote down definite things that he had done that disqualified him, dating back twenty years. And they signed their names to it. “I saw him,” for an example (I remember one of the charges), “hand out bottles of liquor to people in the minority community to get them to vote the way he wanted them to vote.” And people signed their names to that. People heard him use God’s name in vain in conversation numbers of times, and people signed their names to these charges. Well, you don’t find anything in the New Testament about that. I don’t find anywhere, anywhere in the New Testament where people dealt with a situation like that, but it was a bad situation. It needed to be corrected.

Now it would be real easy for someone to come along and say, “Oh, that’s unscriptural.” Well, show me where it’s

a violation of Scripture. Now, to bring an instrument of music into the worship would be a violation of Scripture. That would be unscriptural, because you’ve added an element to worship that God has not authorized. And if someone started advocating sprinkling for baptism instead of immersion, that would be unscriptural because it goes contrary to the teachings of God’s will.

But when you deal with a situation that’s just begging to be dealt with, and it falls into the realm of judgment, since the Scriptures do not specifically cover that, then it seems to me that rational and plausible people can sit down and say, “Here is the way that we’re going to have to deal with this.” We can’t just ignore it; we can’t just sit by and do nothing. We’ve got to deal with the situation. Question how? Well, it’s real easy for some to sit on the sidelines and say, “That’s unscriptural.” But when you analyze it, why would it be unscriptural to allow people to express their sentiments in regard to whether a man is qualified or not? After all, when elders were selected, people in the congregation expressed their sentiments, because what do we usually do in the selection of elders, even though it’s not specifically outlined in the New Testament, we usually use Acts chapter six, and after the preacher preaches several sermons on the qualifications of elders in 1 Timothy three and Titus chapter one, and the responsibility of elders to shepherd the flock in 1 Peter 5 and passages like that, then we say to the congregation, “Search ye out from among yourselves fine men that you feel are qualified, and place their, give their names to the present eldership. And then the eldership usually has a screening committee to take the ones that are most often mentioned and have the greatest support within the congregation, and those are the names that are generally put forward.

But where do you read anything in the Bible about all of that procedure? You don’t, but good judgment tells you that’s probably the best way to do it. The selection of the men in Acts six evidently were the first servants of the church or deacons in the church. But we use that as a precedent to also select elders. Now if the congregation was allowed to express themselves in that regard, let’s just move on down the stream of time for ten years, and some of these men that were put in have proven themselves totally disqualified and are causing dissension within the body of Christ and about to divide the church, are we just going to sit by and do nothing? Or should we say to the congregation, “Examine your Scriptures, and see whether these men have remained qualified.” If they’ve disqualified themselves, please express yourselves. I don’t see anything wrong with that myself, but I’m not the most brilliant scholar that ever came down the pike. And I’ll admit that maybe I’m wrong at it, but I concur with what Denny said.

Tom Gaumer:

I concur with both my brethren on this. I thought a reaffirmation might come in handy where there’s some elders who should have never been put in in the first place. I had that experience several years ago. I was preaching on weekends for a congregation in Ohio, while I taught at Ohio Valley College (that was my regular job). And they had two elders, and the two elders were obviously not qualified for

several reasons.

Then an incident arose that was quite scandalous, and they were powerless to do anything about it. I find out that there happened to be a Korean preacher visiting in this country, had come to that congregation, and held 'em a meeting, and informed 'em that what they needed there were some elders. It was a small congregation; so he himself put these two men in, and neither of 'em were qualified to be elders. Maybe if we had had some kind of reaffirmation, to get the congregation to do it, that they might have become aware of the fact these two men were not qualified. I did try to talk to both of 'em and get them to step down, and they wouldn't do it, and I had no other choice but to leave the congregation at that time. Interestingly enough, the name of the city, the little town, where the church was, was called Veto. But they wouldn't veto these two elders that they had put in.

March 3, 2003

Dear Denny,

Thank you for your letter. Before I reply, let me mention how much I appreciate the material that you furnished for the Shenandoah lectures on The Minor Prophets; it has been very helpful.

I reviewed your answer from the Longview Forum, and you are correct in saying that you distinguished between those who sin and those who are not qualified. However, there remains a Biblical way of dealing with such a situation: that situation should be dealt with by the elders, who oversee the flock. Just as they should guard against a wolf in sheep's clothing, they should tell a fellow elder that he is no longer qualified. It is their responsibility; on what basis does it devolve back upon the congregation? Is this a matter of opinion? How can it be, when the elders have been given the specific task of taking care of the church of God (1 Tim. 3:5)? You admit that there's not a book, chapter, and verse for re-evaluation yet affirm that it is "still heavily Bible-based." You are correct in the former but seem to be amiss in the latter. If

God has put someone in charge of the congregation (and he has, as you pointed out), then why not let them do their job? Why circumvent these men in order to ask those who are not authorized to make such a decision?

Certainly, I am not impugning your motives in this matter, but do you not see the many dangers in reaffirmation? I cannot argue against the example you gave without knowing the particulars. In what way did the man become unqualified without sinning? Certainly, he could not have ceased being blameless or suddenly developed into a brawler. The only thing that comes to mind is that his wife died. One does not need a reaffirmation of all the elders to figure that one out. If a majority of members think he should resign, then he should. That question can be determined without any kind of reaffirmation process.

The idea of the flock deciding whether or not to follow certain men is dangerous and invites all sorts of petty jealousies to surface—not to mention playing politics. If the elders are qualified and performing their work, they should not have to test their popularity periodically. What if Jeremiah used popularity to decide if he should continue preaching? Jesus didn't ask the Pharisees for a vote of confidence. Neither did God set up the church with a built-in reaffirmation process. To answer your question, yes, I believe reaffirmation involves a Scriptural violation.

Yours in Christ,

/s/Gary W. Summers
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“UNION IN DIVERSITY” CONTRADICTS NEW TESTAMENT UNITY

David P. Brown

It is a matter of Biblical fact that Jesus expects Christians (members of His church—Matthew 16:18, His spiritual body—Colossians 1:18, His kingdom—Colossians 1:13, His family—1 Timothy 3:15) to be united (John 17:20-23). Thus, we must understand that the New Testament’s teaching on unity is not an optional matter. In order for us to be faithful to Him, we *must* (it is obligatory) have and sustain the unity or oneness of the church as that term is defined and used in the New Testament. Thus, in contending for the faith (Jude 3) we are obligated to teach, practice, and contend for the New Testament’s teaching on unity as much as we are to teach, practice and contend for the New Testament’s teaching on baptism, or the Lord’s Supper, or the one church, etc. Further, we are to expose and refute any doctrine that arrays itself against the New Testament doctrine of unity. When people tamper with the New Testament’s teaching on any obligatory matter (including its teaching on unity), except they repent of such sinful actions, they guarantee for themselves eternal damnation when this world ends.

However, it is also a Biblical fact that in the years following the establishment of our Lord’s church (even as the New Testament was being written in the First Century AD), brethren began to accept lies in the place of and for New Testament teaching (Mat. 7:13-20; 2 Thess. 2:7; Acts 15:1, 2; 20:28-32; 1 Cor. 15:12; Gal. 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 4:1-3; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1; 2 John 8-11; Jude 3; Rev. 2:2, 14, 15, 20). Thus, between the First Century and the present, the great majority of all those who have believed in Christ as their Savior actually think these lies are what the Bible teaches.

Two prime examples of such lies are the false doctrines of sectarian denominationalism and salvation by “faith only”. Thus, when it comes to the unity for which Christ prayed, most of those who believe in Christ have accepted the following false premise—*As long as Christians agree on something, then there is unity*. But many others do not even believe in being united on anything. Herein is the reason that I have titled this article “Union in Diversity Contradicts New Testament Unity.” What they call “unity in diversity” is no unity at all—it is a *union* of diverse and contradictory beliefs. For such an outfit the Lord never prayed. This is the case because this perverted view of unity never came into His mind. Thus, the apostles never commanded it. Therefore, we need to study what the Bible has to teach us about the unity God expects his people to teach and practice.

With these salient points regarding unity and division before us, let us remember that the inspired apostle Paul, speaking as an ambassador of the Court of Heaven, thus speaking on behalf of Christ, not only commanded unity, but by revelation of the Holy Spirit also gave us God’s seven plank platform for it (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6). Surely the

unity that Paul demanded (1 Cor. 1:10), and the platform for unity he discusses in Eph. 4:1-6, was and is the same unity for which our Lord prayed (John 17:20-21), and in which we must remain (1 Cor. 7:17b; Phil. 3:16; 2 Tim. 2:2).

Before going further in our study, we want to engage in a brief study of God’s platform for unity as taught by the apostle Paul in Eph. 4:1-6. Such a background study will help us in our investigation and refutation of the false doctrine of “union in diversity.”

We begin by examining the mindset or attitude taught by Paul in Ephesians 4:2, which attitude Christians must possess if the unity he discusses is to be brought to fruition, practiced and preserved. This state of mind must be one of lowliness, meekness and humility (Eph. 4:1-3). *This is not a mental disposition of weakness, but a mindset that is willing at all costs to submit to proper authority. Further, a meek person is one who does not put himself forward and run ahead of God, but is ready to comply with whatever God authorizes to be done*. Whether one is sent into the hottest and thickest part of the battle, or is simply authorized to remain with the baggage while others actively engage in the fighting, the meek person will do his best without complaint or gainsaying to discharge the duties his superiors authorize him to do. The apostle Peter also taught that Christians are to be clothed with humility (1 Peter 5:5-7). Humility is the opposite of pride, of being puffed-up, of arrogance and of a self-willed spirit. However, let us re-emphasize that a humble person is not one who has an insipidly weak character, but is one who is courageous when it comes to obeying his Lord’s Will.

New Testament unity demands that every Christian be considerate of all men, especially our brethren (Phil. 2:2-4). We want our brothers and sisters in Christ to be faithful to the Lord in all things because we want them to go to heaven. We must love our brethren to the point of suffering at their hands because we are considerate enough of them to tell them the Truth that they, in many cases, are not prepared to receive (Acts 7:51-60; 2 Cor. 12:15; Gal. 2:14; 3:1ff; 4:16).

The Word of God is not only to be preached with boldness and power, but also with a sense of urgency. And, it is to be preached to people when they desire it and when they do not desire it (2 Tim. 4:2). This also means that in order to have and keep New Testament unity, no faithful child of God will ever allow his or anyone else’s own personal likes or dislikes to come before doing God’s Will. The Christian will make all things secondary and subsidiary to the interests of our Lord—the New Testament doctrine on the unity of believers being one of his chief interests (Mat. 6:33).

We may therefore conclude that, in order to embrace and preserve the New Testament’s teaching regarding unity, we must embrace the spirit of gentleness and meekness as these

terms are defined and used in the sacred writings relative to complying with God's Will. In like manner this aspect of the spirit of holiness will be employed by the teachers of Truth as they work with brethren in teaching them the importance of complete submission to God's Will in all things. This is especially important in creating and keeping the unity of believers in Christ, which unity is revealed only on the pages of the New Testament. This is the case because it is this disposition of mind that accepts and submits to God's instructions on anything (James 1:21; 3:13-18).

Also, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, and patience are needed by the teacher if he is to be successful in imparting the whole counsel of God to the church, which counsel includes the New Testament doctrine of "the unity of believers." Thus, Paul instructed Timothy, and thereby all Bible teachers, to teach the Word "**with all longsuffering and doctrine**" (2 Tim. 4:2b; 2 Tim. 2:2). We must understand that it is difficult to persuade some people to give up their long held false religious convictions and to replace them with the New Testament's teaching. For example, consider those groups that must give up their whole way of life in order for them to embrace the Truth that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and the only Savior of the world—John 14:6 (Muslims, Jews, etc.), that the Bible alone is sufficient to lead us to heaven—2 Tim. 3: 16-17; James 1:25 (Catholics, Mormons), and on and on we could go citing the errors that men must give up, but many find difficult to do, in order to be obedient to Christ in all things. Thus, as God exhibits great patience, forbearance and longsuffering to us, we too must emulate Him in putting into practice the same things in our efforts to teach people God's Will on any subject, especially concerning the unity of believers (2 Cor. 10:1-6). Notice that Paul wrote to Timothy, informing him about his exercise of the same disposition toward those he sought to convert to Christ and especially the brethren he sought to develop spiritually (Rom. 2:4; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Peter 3:14-18).

In this present evil world, the devil constantly seeks to wear Christians down. Therefore, in order to thwart and overcome his efforts to destroy us, we must tenaciously hold on to the Truth of God's Word (1 Tim. 4:1-5; 1 Cor. 15:58; Rev. 2:10). It will be the meek and humble brethren who do so. They will always comply with Paul's instructions found in 1 Cor. 15:58. Thus, in the end of all things, they will gain the inevitable spiritual victory of eternal life in heaven (Rev. 2:10).

Further, in order for the unity of the Spirit to prevail among the brethren, there must be a love for the things God has obligated us to do in order to be faithful to Him. It was the Christ who commanded the apostles to love one another (John 13:34-35). Paul went into detail to the Corinthian brethren about how love manifests itself in the life of a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 13:4-8). Paul made it clear that Christians' love for God, their fellow man, and the church always leads them to obey Him. This of course includes the New Testament's teaching on the unity of believers (1 Peter 1:22; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). Thus, the embodiment and expression of love in the life of a Christian are fundamental to

possessing and keeping the Scriptural unity of the church (1 Peter 3:8-11).

In Ephesians 4:3 Paul directs us to put forth our best efforts as quickly as and in the best way possible (with urgency—"endeavoring") to have and keep the "**unity of the spirit in the bond of peace**" (2 Peter 3:14). He displayed this same desire toward Timothy and Titus when he sent for them to come to him without delay (Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:9, 21). It is how we should approach all things in our service to God.

In over 40 years of preaching, I do not remember a time when I have witnessed brethren engage in the Lord's work with a sense of urgency. In most cases, if they can put off the Lord's work to do something else that holds greater interest for them, they will readily do it. And, it is sad, but all too true that elders are some of those who are the most guilty of "foot-dragging" in doing the work of the Lord. However, such urgency in discharging our duties to God should never cause us to be slack in being sure that we are faithful in our actions to Him (2 Peter 1:10). All of us must possess and put into practice the principles of a Godly attitude if New Testament unity is to be reached and continued.

It will be noticed that the Biblical definitions of the terms *meekness*, *forbearance*, *gentleness*, *patience*, and *longsuffering* do not allow for weakness of character on the part of brethren or for a compromising attitude toward the doctrine of Christ in order to achieve and hold on to some kind of unity among believers in Christ. When Paul commanded the Corinthian brethren to be united (to be of the same mind and the same judgment), he made it clear that he did not expect them to achieve the unity he authorized at the expense of the Truth of God's Word (1 Cor. 1:10). Compromising the Truth to bring about unity does not work. This is the case because it permits those in disagreement to continue to believe they are right. The unity, therefore, that is from God is not the same as man's concept of unity, and it is not created and sustained in the same way. *Biblical unity never has and never will allow toleration for error in obligatory matters.*

THE SEVEN ONES

Now we turn our attention to the seven planks in the Holy Spirit's platform for unity (Eph. 4:1-6). These "seven ones" are very unique in that they reveal God's thinking concerning the unity for which Christ prayed and Paul commanded.

1. There is one body—one organization of the saved. *Thus, there is unity in the organization of God's people.* That one body is the church (Eph. 1:22, 33; Col. 1:18). It was Jesus who built His church (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2). Paul makes it clear that though Christians are many, we are one (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12). The Lord adds the saved to His church. Thus no one can join the one body of Christ (Acts 2:47). Further, both Jews and Gentiles are reconciled to God and one another in one body—the church (Eph. 2:14-22). Thus, spiritual peace is found in the unity of the spiritual body of Christ.

2. There is one Spirit. This is the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Godhead. *Thus, there is unity in revelation.* The Holy Spirit revealed the mind of Christ to the Lord's apostles. In turn the apostles delivered His Word to us (1 Cor. 2:9-13). Jesus had promised the apostles that this would happen (John

16:14-15). Hence, to be instructed by the Word of God is to be instructed by Jesus Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit via the apostles and New Testament prophets in the Words of the New Testament (Eph. 6:17; Luke 8:11; John 12:48). Further, when the apostle John instructed Christians to try or test the spirits, he is simply telling all of us to examine all doctrines in the light of the Spirit's singular revelation—the New Testament of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1-3). When we are instructed by the Word of Truth regarding the obligations we must discharge in order to be saved from our alien sins, we enter the one body (the church) by one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 2:41, 47). As Paul wrote, we are “**baptized into Christ**” (Gal. 3:27). Hence, to accept a different spirit is nothing more or less than to accept a different revelation from the New Testament of Christ (2 Cor. 12:13). Thus, there is only one revelation from God to man, not many, as the Mormons, Muslims, etc., falsely claim.

3. There is one hope. *Thus, there is unity in the one eternal goal for Christians—Heaven.* Only when Christians enter Heaven will they receive their final and eternal reward (Eph. 1:17-19; Col. 1:3-6). Therefore, Paul wrote about the Christians hope of eternal life, and that this hope is part of the New Testament system that saves us (Titus 1:1-3; Rom. 8:24). In the New Testament, to hope for something is to expect what we have been promised—what we have a right to receive. Couple the previous ideas with an earnest desire to receive the Christian's inheritance, and we have the foundation of the Biblical doctrine of hope. Further, one understands the fundamentals of the Biblical doctrine of the church's hope. Hence, in the church both Jews and Gentiles are looking to the same eternal goal (Acts 15:11). So we see that there are not different eternal goals—one for the Muslims, one for the Mormons, etc. There is one eternal goal for all of those who are saved by Jesus Christ.

4. There is one Lord. *Thus, there is unity of authority.* Our Heavenly Father gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, all authority in Heaven and on earth (Mat. 28:18). This is why the title *Lord* is aptly and correctly applied to Jesus. Thus, in applying the title to Jesus, Paul is emphasizing that Jesus has the right to rule (Eph. 1:17-23; 1 Tim. 6:14-15). Thus, there is no real spiritual peace to be found, except that peace which comes through one's obedience to Christ's

Gospel (Rom. 1:16; Rom. 5:1; 10:15; Eph. 2:17; Gal. 6:16; Acts 10:36; 2 Thess. 1:8).

The fact that there is only one Lord implies that Christ saves sinners only through His authoritative Word. As Paul points out, God has placed His power (authority) to save man from his sins in the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:16). Hence, in preaching the Gospel of Christ to every creature, every person is exposed to God's power to save sinners from their sins (Mark 16:15; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Whether those who hear the Gospel will avail themselves of its blessings is dependent solely on whether they will discharge the obligations laid upon them therein (Rom. 6:17-18). Thus, those in need of salvation must understand, believe, and obey Christ's Gospel in order to be saved (Mat. 7:21; James 1:25; John 14:15; Heb. 5:9). Further, in order to become a Christian and remain faithful to the Lord, we must act only as the Lord's last Will and Testament authorizes us to act (1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 3:17). *We are then drawn to, held together, and made one in Christ through the binding power of His loving law of liberty* (1 Cor. 1:2; James 1:25).

5. There is one faith—the One Doctrine, the Word, the Gospel. Paul uses the word *faith* as a synecdoche—where a part stands for the whole or the whole for its parts. In this case it is a part (faith) standing for the whole New Testament system. *Thus, there is unity in the one system of belief.* And, no man or angel has authority to alter it in any form or fashion (Gal. 1:6-10). Only through this common system of Faith is the unity of believers delivered to mankind (Eph. 4:11-13).

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Thereby we have a common faith (Titus 1:4; 2 Peter 1:1).

When people ask us of what faith we are, our answer should be: “The one faith of which Paul writes in Ephesians 4 and for which Jude declared we should contend” *Hence, the view that declares if one is sincere, it does not matter what one believes, is shown to be palpably false.*

6. There is one baptism. *Thus, there is unity in entering Christ.* This is the water baptism that is to be preached until the end of the world—that the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius were commanded to obey (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 7:3-39; Acts 22:15; 10:48). Therefore, Peter declared that it is “**for the remission of sins**” and that baptism saves us (Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21). Further, Paul wrote that one is baptized into Christ and that to become a Christian all who have believed in Christ, repented of their sins, and confessed their belief that Christ is the Son of God, must be immersed in water for the remission of their sins (Gal. 3:26-28; Rom. 6:3, 4; Col. 2:12; Acts 2:38). But in the face of all that the New Testament teaches on this subject, most people who look to Jesus for salvation continue to declare that one does not have to be baptized to be saved, or that the purpose of water baptism makes no difference with God (Mark 16:16).

7. There is one God—our Heavenly Father (1 Cor. 8:6). *Thus, there is unity in one object of worship.* As previously noted, we become the children of God when we are baptized for the remission of our sins, which action constitutes being born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3, 5; 1 John 3:1-3). Thereby Jew and Gentile alike are justified by the one God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:30). There is not one God for the Jews, one for the Muslims, one for the Mormons, one for the Calvinists, etc. There is only one God who sent His Son to save all mankind from the eternal consequences of sin. He and His will regarding salvation are sufficiently revealed in the Bible (John 3:16; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-4; James 1:21-22).

It is important to point out that the number “seven” in apocalyptic symbolism loses its numerical value and represents the idea of perfection in the sense of completeness. Thus, no one of the seven planks in God’s platform for the church’s unity may be ignored and God’s unity become and remain a reality in the church. The plan for unity set out in Eph. 4:1-6 is the only plan for unity that is acceptable to God. It, therefore, is the only one that works to bring about and sustain the oneness of the church for which Jesus prayed and Paul commanded.

“UNION IN DIVERSITY”

In the light of what we have previously learned, we want to emphasize that Christianity is the religion of Biblical authority (Mat. 28:18; John 14:15; Col. 3:17; Heb. 5:9). Thus, if we are to learn about Christian unity we must *respect* Bible authority (Luke 8:15; Mat. 5:6; John 7:17), learn *how* to ascertain it, and learn *what* it authorizes us to do. In so doing, we discover our obligations to God regarding our salvation needs. Then we must be *willing* to discharge those obligations regardless of the sacrifices we must make in order to do so. Further, this also means that we must be willing to leave alone whatever the Bible does not authorize, as well as what

the Bible expressly forbids.

This brings us to another vital topic so very necessary for us to understand if we are to know God’s Will concerning unity. It is the Biblical doctrine of love. *Many believers in Christ have a false concept of Love. To them it is a sick, subjective sentimentalism.* When it holds sway over a person, it causes people (Christians included) to excuse themselves and others from obeying God. However, true Bible love always leads people to obey the precepts and mandates of our King. Therefore, we learn a most important lesson about the Scriptural relationship of love to authority—the *love principle never rises higher or sets aside the authority of God’s Word. The love of which Paul wrote in 1 Cor. 13 always leads one to submit to whatever it is that God has authorized. Accordingly men are obligated to do what God requires of them in order to be saved from their alien sins, thereby become a Christian and faithfully live the Christian’s life (1 Cor. 15:58; 1 John 2:3-5, 29 [See Psa. 119:172 regarding verse 29]; 5:2-3; Heb. 5:9).*

Accepting the previous statements to be true, we affirm that the only primary source of information for us to study in order to reach a correct understanding of the unity for which Jesus prayed, and the apostle Paul authorized, is the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular (John 17:21; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 2:1-13; James 1:25; Luke 8:11; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12; John 12:48). Of course, this means that the student must know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth (2 Tim. 2:15). It is, then, the case that knowing how to handle aright the Word of Truth is the only way for one to learn how the Bible authorizes, which authority

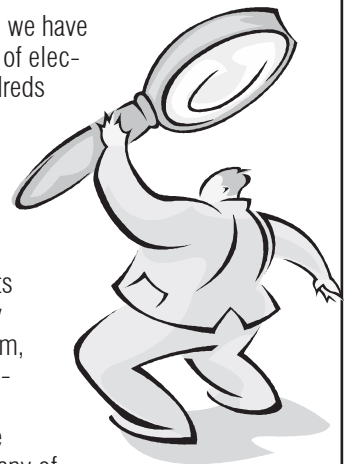
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people *must* have for all they believe and practice in order to be pleasing to God (Col. 3:17; John 12:48; 2 John 8-10). We may therefore conclude that where ignorance of, or lack of respect for, the right division of God's Word and/or Biblical authority is absent, the unity for which the Lord prayed and Paul authorized cannot exist. *To seek "the unity of believers in Christ" on any other basis than New Testament authority is futile and destined to failure.* Nevertheless, the previous fact does not mean that certain men will reject the unity of believers in Christ for some other concept other than the true basis—the authority of God's Word. In fact, those who repudiate the importance of Bible authority try to say that love is all that matters. But the love they advocate cannot be the love that Jesus, Paul and John lived out in their lives, taught others to have, and for which they contended. I know the preceding to be the case because of what is revealed in their actions concerning the love they upheld and advocated—it always led them to discharge their obligations to God (John 14:15). *The truth of the matter is this, one cannot prove his love for God and the things of God except by rendering obedience to God's Word.*

The following quotation is from Dallas Burdette. His background is the anti-Bible class and one cup faction within the Lord's church. However, he now embraces the Rubel Shelly, Randy Harris, Max Lucado, ACU, DLU, et al., brand of "union in diversity." Burdette well defines what we mean by "union in diversity" in our present study. He wrote:

This brief analysis of Unity in Jesus demonstrates that imperfection in understanding does not, in and of itself, warrant the stigma of false prophets as a result of misinterpretation. Also this paper discusses the failure on the part of many Christians in their oversight to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people. To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). Since God accepted them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow Christians for whom Christ died. Many devout Christians do not realize the purpose of Jesus' prayer because they do not discern who is or who is not a false prophet in the light of the context of Matthew's narrative. Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union. This paper explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayer for singularity of purpose. Since my personal ministry is primarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warring factions, each promoting its own brand of Christianity. Today, for example, within the Churches of Christ, one soon discovers that there

are approximately twenty-five divisions—each claiming to be the loyal church. Each group maintains that it is speaking where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. For one not to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group is to receive the label false prophet. Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for one to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, one does not distinguish between one's critique of God's Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the "at odds" fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks. Unity among many Churches of Christ is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity. But numerous Churches of Christ are returning to the Biblical concept of unity in diversity. And, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many elders and preachers, the unity in conformity group labels the unity in diversity fellowship as false teachers or liberal brethren (Excerpt from Dallas Burdette's **Biblical Studies**, *Freedom In Jesus: An Analysis Perfection and Imperfection in Knowledge*, <http://www.freedominchrist.net/>).

The previous quote is representative of the thinking done by those who have corrupted the Bible's teaching on unity. That being the case, the quote *shows us that when men are allowed to define their terms to suit themselves they can make it appear to many that their doctrine is taught by the Bible. But such action on anyone's part will make it appear one can prove about anything by the Bible.* Of course such gross license expressed by Burdette in the previous quotation is only another ploy by Satan to convince men to replace the Will of God with their own wills. Those things being as they are, let us emphasize that God's Will is clearly set out in the humanly attainable, absolute, objective, infallible, complete and final standard for all things righteous—the Bible handled aright (2 Tim. 2:15).

I have deliberately substituted "union" for "unity" in the title of this article. I did this because of what Burdette and others believe and teach about "oneness in belief and practice." *Simply put they are calling for a union without unity.* And, that is exactly what "unity in diversity" means when it comes to it members of the church.

"Unity in diversity" in matters of obligation is in reality an oxymoron—something that does not exist. In this case of "unity in diversity," it only exists in the rebellious and fermented minds of ignorant and wicked men. For example, a thing cannot be completely wet and completely dry at the same time, or completely cold and completely hot at the same time and to the same degree, or one cannot be lost in sin and saved from sin at the same time, or one cannot be right and wrong at the same time about a certain topic, or a proposition cannot be true and at the same time false. Thus, things cannot be united and at the same time and to the same degree divided—Burdette and friends notwithstanding. They may have union, but they do not have unity, Biblical or any other kind. *Only an ignoramus or a deceitful worker would try to successfully prove otherwise.*

Burdette believes that there are "approximately twenty-five divisions" in the churches of Christ. *He alleges that these*

divisions are the result of following what he considers to be the false premise of “unity in conformity” in the place of “unity in diversity”. As is true of most liberals (those who by their doctrines loose men from what God in the Bible binds on them), Burdette thinks that nearly all divisions imply that we are wrong in approaching the New Testament as an authoritative pattern. He fails to realize that the same infallible pattern makes it clear that factions will arise in the church because certain unfaithful brethren prefer their own will or other men’s wills to the Will of God. Thus Paul wrote: **“For there must be also heresies (factions, sects—DPB) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you”** (1 Cor. 11:19). Burdette and friends say that our approach to the New Testament is the reason for the various and sundry divisions in the Lord church. But Paul said such divisions are necessary to prove who is acceptable to God and who is not. I think I will take Paul’s inspired explanation for the existence of factions in the church rather than Burdette’s view of why division happens in the church.

This man is opposed to “unity in conformity” because he says such “conformity” is not to the doctrine of Christ, but to the “status quo.” From our previous quote from Burdette, we learn what he means by “unity in conformity” based on the “status quo.” Again, note what Burdette wrote:

Today, for example, within the Churches of Christ, one soon discovers that there are approximately twenty-five divisions — each claiming to be the loyal church. Each group maintains that it is speaking where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. For one not to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group is to receive the label false prophet. Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for one to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, one does not distinguish between one’s critique of God’s Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the “at odds” fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

However, Burdette rejoices that “numerous Churches of Christ are returning to the Biblical concept of unity in diversity.” Thus, Burdette further reveals that he firmly believes that “unity in diversity” is “the Biblical concept” on which all believers in Christ may be “one” and thereby answer Jesus’ prayer for unity. Thus, we pose the question: “What is ‘unity in diversity?’” as it relates to the unity of those who believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of the World.

The “unity in diversity” concept comes from man’s false view of truth. Such persons believe that truth is subjective and relative. This means that whatever one thinks truth to be at the moment, under given circumstances and in different situations, it is. Of course, circumstances and situations many times change, and with those changes, according to the subjective relativist, truth follows suit. Thus, they affirm that truth is not unchanging, absolute and objective but changing, subjective, and relative. This is the view of truth that dominates, permeates and undergirds most modern thought.

Those that follow this line of thinking are the advocates

of the philosophy of Pluralism. *Religious Pluralists believe that one belief system is as right, good, and the way to heaven as any other belief system.* Thus, with many people a cultural, intuitive, personal subjectivism has usurped the rational and logical approach to determining the truth about anything, especially things religious. Persuaded by such nonsense, many members of the church are programmed to be “sensitive” to the felt needs of their fellow man, especially their brethren. This mindset has replaced the mental determination on the part of some church members to remain “steadfast” to the absolute, objective body of Truth that is the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular and, thereby, steadfast to every component part of the “**perfect law of liberty**” (James 1:25; 1 Cor. 15:58).

Certain men have been persuaded to be absolute in their knowledge about one thing and one thing only—*one cannot absolutely know anything.* Truly this is the time of the ignominy and the absurd to the extreme in the Western World. Especially is it the case in the church when brethren have become so blind that they cannot see the contradiction that is self-evident in the statement that *one cannot absolutely know anything.* No wonder in recent years the “New Hermeneutics” of the Postmodernists have poisoned the minds of the academics in the church. Then, the churches that tenaciously hang on to them, like nursing puppies stuck to their mother’s breast, are also polluted with their relativism and subjectivism. We should not be amazed that those thus governed in their thinking have no time for learning hermeneutical principles of Bible study that are coeval to the investigation of the objective and absolute body of Truth that is the Bible.

To the religious pluralists the Bible is a “love letter.” In describing it accordingly, they simply mean that the Bible tells sinful man of God’s love for him, informs him of what that love motivated God to do through His Son, Jesus Christ, in order to redeem sinful man. Further, it teaches man that all one must do to be saved by Christ is to mentally affirm God’s love for him as manifested in the Christ in His suffering and death on the cross for man’s sins. This is the so-called “core gospel,” and beyond it, according to the liberal mindset, nothing else is a salvation matter. On this erroneous concept of truth, the religious pluralists declare that all believers in Christ can unite and remain one. Therefore, in their relative and subjective mental fog, the Bible is not an absolute objective, complete, infallible and final standard of right and wrong. From their viewpoint, one is not to study it, seeking authority for all one believes and practices. Moreover, if one attempts to study the Bible accordingly, that person becomes a negative, vile, unloving, judgmental, and poisonous factionist. These relativists view such a person to be void of any love for God, Christ, his fellow man, and especially his brethren. Hence, for the Pluralists such persons are impediments to the unity of believers for which Christ prayed.

As we have seen and further emphasize here, religious subjective relativists of every stripe, including those in the church of Christ, assert that the unity for which Jesus prayed and that Paul discusses in Eph. 4:1-6 *is not* a unity designed to bring Christians into conformity with each other in their

beliefs and practices. As noted earlier, they say that the various factions that have arisen in the church are proof that any view of the Bible that calls for conformity in conduct and doctrine is wrong and must be rejected. This is the reason they oppose what they call “pattern theology.” They conveniently ignore what Paul plainly told the Corinthians to do in 1 Cor. 1:10, which instruction demanded, at least on certain matters, conformity in belief and practice. Paul demanded that Christians **“speak the same thing.”** The believers in “unity and diversity” do not require this of anyone. In fact, they oppose such an idea. *Paul did not want any divisions among the brethren in obligatory matters.* Burdette and friends’ “unity in diversity” demands such divisions and condones them. Paul said Christians are to **“be perfectly (completely-DPB) joined together in the same mind and the same judgment.”** Burdette and those who advocate “unity in diversity” kick at the idea Paul demands and blame his teaching for the divisions in the church.

Noah and his seven family members were a very small group when compared to the rest of the world’s population, but Noah and his family were right with God and all the rest of mankind were wrong—dead wrong. God said of Noah concerning his compliance with God’s Word, **“Thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he”** (Gen. 6:22). Yet, this man and his family were also saved by God’s grace (Gen. 6:8). Therefore, the inspired writer to the Hebrews wrote: **“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith”** (Heb. 11:4). Paul said that such Old Testament accounts were written for our learning (Rom. 15:4). One of the things we learn from this account is that it was imperative that Noah comply with the specifics of God’s Will in order for God to save him and his family from the flood. We ask Burdette and his friends to tell us what component part of the body of instruction Noah received from God could Noah omit or change and Moses by inspiration truthfully write of him what he did in Gen. 6:22? Now, is Burdette going to tell us that we can approach the perfect law of liberty (the Gospel system) in a different manner from what Noah did? Evidently Burdette thinks so. Sadly he is not alone in the church in teaching such error.

THE TRUE WAY TO UNITY

At this point we are ready to study further what the true way to unity in the church is. As we do, please remember what we have already studied in our brief analysis of Ephesians 4:1-6. To that material we want to add and emphasize that the perfect law of liberty is a body of doctrine originally written in a language of God’s choosing (Koine Greek). It, therefore, along with any language into which it is correctly translated, is subject to all the rules governing a language.

All languages authorize by direct statements, examples, and implication. No man invented direct statements, examples, and implication. Over the many years that language has been studied, men have discovered how language works and have identified and labeled the various parts of speech,

etc. Thus, they learned how languages authorize. Whether it is English, German, Hebrew, Greek, French, Spanish, etc., they all authorize in the three ways we have already listed. No one can successfully refute the fact that direct statements, examples and implication are the means whereby languages authorize anyone to do anything. *The simple proof of this is seen in the fact that when anyone attempts to attack and refute the three ways that languages authorize, that foolish person is immediately forced to employ them (direct statements, examples, and implication) in his efforts to refute the very thing he must employ in order to do so. It is a self-contradictory and, thus, self-defeating process.* The inconsistent and dogmatic ignorance of such men never ceases to amaze me.

To benefit from the New Testament as God intended, we must approach the study of the New Testament, understanding that it is an objective document, infallibly delivered by God to us and that we are to do in religion only what it authorizes us to do. I repeat, we must know that such authorization is accomplished through the Bible’s direct statements, examples, and implication. Also, in an objective body of doctrine such as **“the perfect law of liberty,”** there is expressed by direct statements, examples, and implication man’s obligations to God. There are Biblical obligations an alien sinner must discharge in order to be saved from his sins, and there are Biblical obligations that members of the Lord’s church must discharge in order to be faithful. Moreover, with every obligation there are options from which we may choose whereby we can discharge these obligatory matters. Also, we must not get obligatory and optional matters confused. Before there can be a discussion of what the best option is for expediting the discharge of an obligation, one must first have Bible authority for the obligation one is going to discharge. We must not make obligatory matters optional or make optional matters obligatory, that is, if we want to have the unity of believers set out in the New Testament.

In the light of what we have previously studied in this chapter, I affirm the following proposition. *“The Scriptures teach that the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul commanded and discussed (John 17:20, 21; 1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6), is obtained and continued only when men discharge their Biblical obligations pertaining thereto.”* A corollary to the preceding proposition is this: *“Without being able to ascertain Biblical authority it is impossible to determine what God obligates alien sinners to do in order to be saved from their sins.”* Another corollary is: *“Without being able to ascertain Biblical authority, it is impossible for members of the church to determine their Biblical obligations, which obligations must be discharged in order for them to remain faithful to God in His church and have unity prevail.”* A third corollary is the following one. *“When men cannot determine their Biblical obligations to God, they cannot discharge them.”* Thus, in a fourth corollary we also affirm: *“When members of the church fail to discharge their obligations to God, it is impossible for Biblical unity to exist.”*

Let it be clearly understood that every division of the church took place because someone (1) taught a doctrine(s) that bound on men what God in His Word did not bind on

them, or (2) some doctrine was taught that loosed men from what God in His Word bound on them, or (3) sinful persons were fellowshiped when corrective church discipline should have been practiced on them to bring them to repentance or, if they would not repent, the fellowship of the church should have been withdrawn from them (1 Cor. 5). It makes no difference how many divisions there are or how many there will be in the church; such divisions prove one thing and one thing only—*some brethren will not abide in the doctrine of Christ*. But such is not the fault of the authoritative Divine pattern that is the New Testament—the standard by which we must conduct ourselves in order to discharge our obligations to God.

Those who advocate “union in diversity” make no distinction between Biblical obligations and the options by which we may discharge them. For example, they are blind to the difference between the Scriptural obligation to worship God in music by discharging the specific Biblical obligation of church members to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), from the options we may employ to discharge the obligation—the PA system, song leader, tuning fork, pitch pipe, songbook, lighting and how many and what kinds of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to sing in the worship assembly.

In optional matters we may be diverse and remain one for the simple reason that options only give us an advantage (they are expeditious) in the discharging of our obligations to God. Thus, what options are available and which ones are more expedient than others vary from time to time and place to place. But obligations pertaining to man’s salvation and the unity of the church never change. Today there are many options available from which we may chose to help us discharge the obligations God has placed on the church. These options did not exist 100 years ago, but the obligations God has placed on us through His authoritative Word are the same today as then. Different Christians and different congregations may use different options to discharge the same obligations. *“Unity in diversity of options” is authorized by the New Testament, but “unity in diversity” regarding obligatory matters is not.*

When Paul and Barnabas separated because they could not agree to take or not to take John Mark with them on their second preaching journey, their difference over John Mark was not one of differing over an obligatory matter. There is no indication that there was a break in fellowship regarding Paul and Barnabas because of their difference regarding John Mark. The church commended Paul and Silas along with Barnabas and John Mark as the two pairs of men went on two different preaching tours to two different parts of the world to discharge the same obligation—preaching the Gospel of Christ to the lost and edifying the saints. But, it was Paul who commanded the church at Corinth not to allow any division to exist in the church and that the church was to be of the same mind and the same judgment. Clearly, division did exist between Paul and Barnabas concerning whether or not to take John Mark with them on their second journey. Their difference was so strong that the two men went their separate ways. **Thus, it must be that the unity that Paul required of the Corinthian church was not dealing with optional**

matters but obligatory matters—matters of salvation. It is this kind of distinction that the liberals such as Burdette fail to recognize in their study of of the New Testament. Thus, they advocate “unity in diversity” in matters of obligation rather than in optional matters.

As far as each autonomous congregation of God’s people is concerned, it is the decision of the eldership of each congregation that has authority from Christ to have the final “say so” in determining what options the church will employ to expedite the obligations that Christ has placed on the church. The same as true of the home. With all other things being Scripturally equal, it is the husband who has the final decision making power in determining what options will be used in discharging the obligations that are peculiar to the home.

Why the subject is so difficult to understand I do not know. With people such as Burdette, I cannot help but conclude that he and they have given up the “truth about Truth,” the truth about love, the truth about the Bible’s teaching that the New Testament is to be approached as a divine blueprint or pattern (Heb. 8:5), and who knows what other matters regarding God’s Truth has Burdette renounced.

Such persons’ fundamental problem is best described by the inspired writer to the Hebrews when he wrote of the Israelites who did not profit from God’s Word. He wrote that **“the word did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it”** (Heb. 4:2). The truth of the matter is that such men as Burdette do not believe what the Bible says. While it certainly could be, it is not necessarily a matter of their lack of understanding what the Bible teaches. It is simply that such people do not believe what the text says, and they are not going to comply with what it demands from them.

In closing this study of the errors of “union in diversity” and the Bible teaching about true unity, we must determine to keep a good and honest heart, that hungers and thirsts after righteousness and is willing to do whatever God obligates us to do (Luke 8:15; Matt. 5:6; John 7:17). The previous sentence contains the requisite dispositions of the heart necessary for us to approach the Word of God as it is in Truth, the infallible,

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inerrant, all-sufficient, final, objective, absolute and complete Will of the Almighty. In so doing we will learn the way to Heaven and how to live properly within it until we reach our Heavenly home.

Truly, God says what He means and means what He says in the Bible. Our attitude toward His Word must be one of: "Speak Lord, thy servant heareth. Command and I will obey." When we live our lives on earth with the attitude of the previous comment permeating and directing our lives,

OF DUB MCCLISH, CURTIS A. CATES WROTE: "A MAN IN WHOM IS NO GUILF, DOCTRINALLY SOUND, A MAN OF STERLING CHARACTER AND IMPECCABLE INTEGRITY"

The unsolicited commendation appearing as the title of this article was commissioned and worded by bro. Curtis A. Cates on behalf of bro. Dub McClish in August 2003. It was to be included with one of Dub's response letters written to refute the then Pearl St. Church of Christ elders' attacks on him.

One false charge made against Dub et. al, and spread by those who bid God speed to bro. Dave Miller (which action is sinful, 2 John 8-10), is that we did not oppose Miller until after McClish and bro. Dave Watson were forced out of *The Gospel Journal* on July 20, 2005. They declare that our motive for opposing Miller and friends is filled with pride, jealousy, vindictiveness and revenge. All of the previous list of sinful motives, they allege, are borne out of a lust for power and control of the church on our behalf. *The fact of the matter is that those who signed said certificate as well as many other brethren fully know that such a charge is palpably false.*

From the time that McClish and many of us learned of the practice of the reaffirmation and re-evaluation of elders by the Brown Trail Church of Christ and Dave Miller's significant part in

the Bible handled aright will truly be our necessary food, and we shall know and experience the unity for which Christ prayed and which the apostle Paul commanded, as our wills are brought into submission to His Will and thereby Christ is formed in us.

—PO Box 2357
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it (first practiced by the B. T. Ch. in 1990, and again in 2002 when Miller was leaving to work with Apologetics Press), we opposed said error, its teachers and those who bid them God speed.

If Cates, et al., with the exception of bro. Michael Hatcher, were opposed to McClish's and our public opposition to said error, why did they continue to appear with us on lectureships? Why were we used on the MSOP Lectures year in and year out? Why, at the 1997 Bellview Lectures when brother McClish wrote and preached against the R&R of elders, with several of his present day accusers who were on said lectures (including Cates), did these men not rebuke bro. McClish for his opposition to Miller? Why was brother McClish invited to be the first editor of *TGJ* to begin with? Why did said men commend many of us when they knew we had for years publicly opposed Miller's errors? Why did Cates, Ratcliff, Hicks, Meador, et al., wait till after McClish and Watson were forced out of *TGJ* before opposing us? Facts are stubborn things that will not go away—though Cates and friends truly wish they would. *Oh, what a tangled web we weave when at first we practice to deceive.* —Editor

Commendation of the Board of Directors

It is with great enthusiasm and pleasure, as *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL* nears the conclusion of its fourth year of significant contributions to the church of the Lord in the field of Christian journalism, that the Board of Directors commends our esteemed editor, brother

Dub McClish

He is a man in whom is no guile, doctrinally sound,
a man of sterling character and impeccable integrity.

Also, we express deep appreciation to every subscriber and encourager of this noble work.

Signed:

<i>Curtis A. Cates</i> President	<i>Michael Hatcher</i> Secretary
<i>Joseph Meador</i> Vice-president	<i>Kenneth Ratcliff</i> Treasurer/Business Manager
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YOU CAN BE FORGIVEN—IF YOU REPENT!

Dave Miller

At the time Paul traveled around the Roman world, the city of Corinth was a very wicked place. It was filled with all sorts of sinful behavior—especially sexual sin. In fact, it was widely considered to be a place of loose morals. The great temple of Aphrodite had 1,000 prostitutes. The city had many bars and taverns where people drank alcohol. “To act the Corinthian” became a common expression that meant to engage in fornication. Fornication is sexual intercourse that God condemns. Corinth indeed was a very sinful place. But the Gospel is powerful! When Paul visited the city and preached the Gospel, guess what happened? **“Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized”** (Acts 18:8). Some of the very people who had been living immoral lives had become Christians! Isn’t that wonderful? When Paul later wrote a letter to the church of Christ in Corinth, he said:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11—NKJV).

Even though some of the Corinthians had done some bad things before they became Christians, they could be forgiven and accepted by Christ. But they had to obey the Gospel to be forgiven of their past sins. When Paul said, **“such were some of you,”** he meant that they had repented of those past sins, which means that they changed their mind about behaving in that way, and stopped doing it! That means that anyone who says that homosexuals are “born that way”

is wrong. Some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals. But they had ceased their behavior. They stopped practicing their homosexuality, even as the idolaters stopped their idolatry and the thieves stopped their stealing.

Isn’t it great that even if we have done some pretty bad things, we can be forgiven and live with God in heaven—if we will repent (*Scripture & Science For Kids Discovery*, Bound Volume 2005; Vol. 16:6, p. 44, Apologetics Press, Inc., Montgomery, AL)?

[**Editorial Comment**—How is it that bro. Miller can write an excellent article on repentance—an article he fully expects honest (in this case) young people to understand and apply to their lives, but he cannot find it within himself to do what he so well understands and teaches others must do in order to be saved from sin—any and all sin?

Several times we have read Millers Sept. 2005 *explanation* of *why* he taught and practiced the R&R of elders at the Brown Trail Church of Christ. But, that article is not a letter of repentance from Miller. It is not an article wherein Miller expresses in no uncertain terms his sin of teaching and practicing the R&R of elders, his repentance concerning it, and it does not intimate any request on his part for the church to pray for his forgiveness. He has never acknowledged that his MDR “intent” doctrine is erroneous and he has never indicated that he thinks he and others on the staff of AP are wrong in presenting their apologetics sermons in churches practicing error, without rebuking said errors. Those are the stubborn facts about Miller concerning these three matters. Yet some brethren willingly blind themselves to Miller’s sins and the glaring fact that Miller has never evidenced repentance on his part regarding them.—**Editor]**

The man who is tenacious of purpose in a rightful cause is not shaken from his firm resolve by the frenzy of his fellow citizens clamoring for what is wrong, or by the tyrant’s threatening countenance (Odes, III, iii, 1, 1).

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-England-

Cambridgeshire—Ramsey Church of Christ, meeting at the Rainbow Centre, Ramsey, Huntingdon. Sun. 10, 11 a.m.; Wed. (Phone for venue and time); www.Ramsey-church-of-christ.org. Contact Keith Sisman, 001.44.1487.710552; fax:1487.813264 or Keith.Sisman.net. Research Website of 1,000 years of the British Church of Christ; www.Traces-of-the-kingdom.org and www.Myth-and-Mystery.org.

-Florida-

Ocoee—Ocoee Church of Christ, 2 East Magnolia Street, Ocoee, FL 34761. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wed. 7:00 p.m. David Hartbarger, Evangelist, (407) 656-2516, ocoechurchofchrist@yahoo.com, www.ocoecoc.org.

Pensacola—Bellview Church of Christ, 4850 Saufley Field Road, Pensacola, FL 32526, Sun. 9:00 a.m., 10:00 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Michael Hatcher, evangelist, (850) 455-7595.

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Rocky Mount—Scheffield Drive Church of Christ, 3309 Scheffield Dr., Rocky Mount, NC 27802 (252) 937-7997.

-Oklahoma-

Porum— Church of Christ, 8 miles South of I-40 at Hwy 2, Warner exit. Sun. 10 a.m., 11 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. Allen Lawson, evangelist, email: lawson@starnetok.net.

-Texas-

Denton area—Northpoint Church of Christ, 5101 E. University Dr. (Greenbelt Business Park). Mailing address: Northpoint Church of Christ, Greenbelt Business Park, 5101 E. University Dr., Box 12, Denton, TX 76208. E-mail: northpointcoc@hotmail.com. Sunday: 9:30, 10:30, 6:00; Wednesday 7:00. Contact: Dub McClish: 940.323.9797; tjoriginal@verizon.net.

Houston area—Spring Church of Christ, 1327 Spring Cypress, P.O. Box 39, Spring, TX 77383, (281) 353-2707. Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:30 p.m., David P. Brown, evangelist. Home of the Spring Contending for the Faith Lectures beginning the last Sunday in February. www.churchesofchrist.com.

Hubbard—105 NE 6th St., Hubbard, TX 76648, Sun. 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m. Delbert J. Goines; djgoins@gmail.com.

Huntsville—1380 Fish Hatchery Rd. Huntsville, TX 77320. Sun. 9, 10 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (936) 438-8202.

New Braunfels—225 Saenger Halle Rd. Sun: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m. Wed. 7:30 p.m. Lynn Parker, evangelist. (830) 625-9367. www.nbchurchofchrist.com.

Richwood—1600 Brazosport, Richwood, TX. Sun. 9:30; 10:30 a.m., 6 p.m., Wed. 7 p.m. (979) 265-4256.

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Cheyenne—High Plains Church of Christ, 421 E. 8th St., Cheyenne, WY 82007, tel. (307) 638-7466, Sunday: 9:30 a.m., 10:30 a.m., 6:00 p.m., Wed. 7:00 p.m., Tel. (307) 514-3394, evangelist: Roelf L. Ruffner

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