

MAINTAINING OUR UNITY

**A PEACEMAKER'S GUIDE TO WALKING WITH
OTHERS, WORTHY OF GOD'S CALLING**

CHAPTER 1

BEHOLD GOD'S GLORY

“The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.”

JOHN 17:22-23¹

The glory of our Lord Jesus—His beauty, His majesty, His magnificence, His splendor—was given to Him by His Father, radiantly revealed in their perfect unity together. It is for this very reason that Christ Himself declared, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father.”² God is inseparable from Christ, as Christ is inseparable from the Spirit, as the Spirit is inseparable from God, on and on and on, eternally.³

¹ All scripture cited from English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted

² John 14:9

³ Isaiah 9:6

But Jesus did not end His prayer by simply communicating the glory God had given Him. In His nearly final recorded prayer on this earth, walking among mankind as we ourselves walk, worthy of all honor and praise, Christ prayed that *we too may be one* as He and the Father are one.

Since perfect oneness with one another is the very glory of God, those who passionately care for the church are often led to making what they believe to be a noble, even holy request upon reading this particular scripture. “Lord, give us unity,” we pray. “Make us one,” we command!

Indeed, we can agree that the intent of such a prayer is holy. However, we must be humbled and corrected to find that we have vastly misunderstood of God’s unity and asked wrongly of the Lord in this manner. As much as we might encounter countless discouraging examples of division among Christians today in our earthly experience, the spiritual reality is quite the opposite.

Praise God, for He has *already* made us one!

Yes, the glory that God gave Christ has already been given to us. To repeat the Gospel of John, Jesus declared, “The glory that you have given me I have *given* to them....” This is a past occurrence, not one that will occur someday, nor one that must continue indefinitely. The three, earth-shaking, world-changing

words that were uttered by the Word stand as true today as ever: “It is finished.”⁴

God breathed and Paul wrote down what the Spirit inspired so that we might further believe and behold this present reality:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

EPHESIANS 4:4

In other words, there no longer remains any separation between us as believers. Whatever our race, language, skin color, giftings, personalities, preferences, experiences, dreams, political affiliations, temptations, denominations, or the like, as saints in Christ Jesus, we are all *one*. A father cannot give an inheritance again after he has already given it to his children, as it is then and forever theirs. Therefore, God cannot give us unity again in the same way that He cannot give us Christ again, because His Son and everything that came with Him was already given “once and for all.”⁵

⁴ John 19:30

⁵ Romans 6:10

Regardless of what we may propose regarding this truth with our minds, we must allow the Spirit to reveal the majestic reality to our hearts. The glory of God’s oneness has now been given to us by Christ, just as He was given oneness by His Father. We have been made “perfectly one” with one another in His body—not potentially, nor partially, but perfectly. This miracle of God must be planted deeply in our individual souls so that we might cultivate its reality in our shared experience.

Unfortunately, we will agree that this divine gift is far from perfectly demonstrated within the church today. Rife with arguments, accusation, slander, gossip, malice, fits of anger, divorce, abandonment, division, manipulation, unforgiveness, and a great many other kinds of selfishness and sin, the church often looks little better than the world, even worse in some cases. The Spirit grieves at our fleshly practices of disunity even while He lavishly ministers the unity of Christ within us at levels indescribable by human reason.

Therefore, the time is Now and the day is Today for us to turn to the Word of God, allowing Him to speak revelation, correction, and instruction from the heavenly realms into our daily walks of faith. Indeed, we must not—even as we cannot—be separated from the singular body of Christ. He calls us now and forever to recognize and maintain the great gift of His unity. For though our

perfect oneness is indestructible, absolutely, may we carefully consider how we handle such treasure.

PRACTICE UNITY, NOT UNIFORMITY

Beyond the fact that our well-intentioned prayers for unity are unnecessary simply due to the truth that God has already answered His Son's request magnificently, such a prayer's expectation can be found rather misplaced, as well. Just beneath the surface of this redundant call to God often lurks a manmade desire not for spiritual unity as it has already been given to us by Christ, but for fleshly uniformity as expected by our human constructs of religion.

We close our eyes, bow our heads, and even wail for the Lord to grant us that which He has already granted us, but the words we utter are not even those we actually mean. "Sameness" does not equate to "Oneness," nor will it ever come close. However, this is often the expectation of many zealous but misguided Christian hearts when crying out to the Lord.

Uniformity is easier to measure, of course. It takes no spiritual discernment to see that men and women use certain vernacular that is deemed holy, wear certain clothes that are deemed appropriate, perform certain acts that are deemed acceptable, and

so on. O how weak our understanding and attempts to discover the unity that can be found in Christ Jesus and Christ Jesus alone!

On a pragmatic level, uniformity may also be one of the fastest paths to boring people—and ourselves—of faith, creating desperation for the thrills that awaits when we encounter the fullness of Christ in the variety of His body. Homogeneity is manufactured by man and completely un-supernatural, something hollow and quite superficial once explored beneath its shiny veneer.

Instead, we have been given a gift that far supersedes blasé uniformity. We have been given the supernatural and extravagant gift of divine unity, the very same essence that has forever, invisibly, and perfectly united the one triune God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. Men and women, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, young and old, black and white, large and small, extroverted and introverted, republican and democrat, prophet and mercy, leader and servant—there is no gap too great that cannot nor *has not* already been filled and brought together by the uniting work of His Spirit.

Just as corporately submitting to the Headship of Christ Jesus maintains our healthy unity in Him, idolatrous submission to the headship of man counter-produces our craving for uniformity. What we have been taught is unity, while lining the pews of our safe and homogenous assemblies, is nothing of the sort. What God

has intended for us since the beginning—perfect oneness with Christ and each other—has already been given to us as generously as our very lives, a reality simply awaiting to be fully acknowledged, enjoyed, and shared.

Let us now have the ears to hear how our gracious God has answered our previously misled request. “Our unity is already Yours,” the Trinity trumpets within our souls. Moreover, may Jesus lead us to the place that He led His apostle, Paul, that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened⁶ to see the unity we have already been given. On that dusty road to Damascus, Christ met the least of all the saints⁷ to reveal then what He continues to impress within the church at large now—that every follower of the Lord Jesus is not separate from His body, but one with it. We are forever united with Him, and yes, united with one another.

In all this, may we revisit our previous misunderstandings and pray more excellently. Lord God, enlighten the eyes of our hearts to see the perfect unity—not uniformity—we share now in You, so that You might more fully reveal Your glory, supernatural power, and love in us, Your body, Your bride, You church. Demonstrate the glory of Your perfect oneness in us so that the world may know

⁶ Ephesians 1:18

⁷ Ephesians 3:8

that You sent Christ and love us even as You love Your Son. May we believe Your Word, forever and ever, amen.

CHAPTER 2

DWELL TOGETHER

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

PSALM 133:1

While it is not known exactly when David wrote this spectacular psalm, we do know that David experienced the glory of unity throughout his life. In his brotherhood with Jonathan, in his relationship with the tribes of Israel as he was anointed, and in his regular encounters with the Spirit of God, David had tasted of heavenly unity. After recognizing what we have already been supernaturally gifted, we too must move beyond our theological understanding of oneness and into a living experience of it.

As the psalmist wrote, dwelling together in unity is indeed good and pleasant. Our invitation from the Father is not to just hear about this dwelling place of the heart, hope to visit it someday, or occasionally enter and exit it as if it is made for a

transient people. Our invitation is to *dwell* in this heavenly existence. We are the family of God, and it is in His house of everlasting that we are to take up residence forever, dwelling in a constant state of unity with our spiritual family.

Sadly, this is not the experience of most Christians or the community cultivated by most local churches even on their best days. Appearing no different than the world, we keep our spiritual family members at arms' length. In the house of the Lord, we take up residence not in the great family rooms and dining halls, but we shut the doors to our private rooms, sometimes even plastering big, fat "Keep Out" signs for all our siblings to respect. Only occasionally do we make our way out of our self-imposed confinement for the obligatory family time, preferably on Sundays to hear one of our "wiser" siblings speak as we silently listen, passively sitting alone and sipping on our milk like children.

As a sidebar, this behavior seems especially true within America due to a wide variety of factors, not least of which is the spirit of independence in which we pride ourselves. Rather than realizing that God calls us to interdependence upon one another and complete dependence upon Him, we believe it is our glory that we live independently. In God's eyes, however, this is not wisdom, but foolishness. He has created us for the shared pursuit of Him, not the individual pursuit of happiness.

Meanwhile, while isolated by the borders we ourselves draw, we crave the experience that David sung of and indeed, the entire New Testament documents. We yearn for our brothers and sisters to break through our needless doors and into our hearts, inviting us closer and closer, often unwilling to be the first to risk such demonstrations of love and desire.

Rather than allow the Lord to displace our own expectations of others, we are left wanting, feeling alone and forgotten. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called these human expectations our “wish dreams,” encouraging that we allow God to replace our desires for community with His dreams instead.⁸ While we long for such community, our family awaits just outside the door and down the hall! The gathering places beckon us, banquet tables of abundant spiritual meat to nourish the heart, soul, and body of every son and daughter of the house. It is only then, when we come to enjoy our fill of the Lord’s goodness together in which we will yield true depth of relationship with our family members. Until that point, we may as well be strangers, for we act as such.

Should we choose to obey the Lord, peek outside the door, and take our first steps down the hall, a good and pleasant blessing there awaits us. As much as it may feel like a risk, in this small

⁸ From the book, *Life Together*

obedience we will begin to discover the worthy way in which saints should all walk.

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit....

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

While we have already established that the Lord cannot give us His unity again, it is an imperative part of God's calling to *maintain* that which has been given to us as His children. Of course, we must never stop gathering together as regularly as possible⁹, but that is the easy part when all things are considered. Recognizing our supernatural oneness may begin our deeper journey, but it only grows more difficult from that point forward.

Maintaining spiritual unity is no easy feat, nor is it something that comes naturally to our flesh. In fact, it is in our maintaining of unity that we will most likely suffer the greatest and most frequent challenge, pain, and even crucifixion in the Spirit. Why? Because even the most mature and healthy familial relationships inevitably encounter conflict.

Living life together as brothers and sisters is where we will undoubtedly experience (and be the cause of!) many disagreements,

⁹ Hebrews 10:25

disappointments, personality clashes, differences of opinions and theologies, unfruitful debates, unmet expectations, feeling left out, wrongful accusation, selfish behavior, and every other type of possible conflict we can imagine. Be assured, in the family of God, we will be wounded deeply. Similarly, we will wound our family members deeply, even if unintentionally.

But take hope and know the Truth! It is in such conflict that we are continually invited to experience spiritual growth and life, allowing the power of Christ's resurrection to be made manifest in us and our relationships with one another. If we surrender these familial conflicts to the Lord so that we might die to more of our flesh, He will also raise us up so that we find an empty tomb there soon afterwards. Experiencing such conflict is inevitably the Way in which the Spirit will yield fruit in or lives. In this pursuit, we will eventually find ourselves beseeching the heavenlies as Jesus did, "Take this cup from me."¹⁰ But God is not purposeless in the reason behind His calling to us.

MINISTER AS PRIESTS

The Psalmist continues with spiritual insight in his praise of unity.

¹⁰ Luke 22:42

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes!

PSALM 133:1-2

This unity that David describes was not just something He had witnessed in an earthly context, but something He saw with prophetic eyes in glory.

First, David likens our dwelling together to the precious oil that consecrated Aaron as a priest of the Most High.

You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may serve Me as priests.

EXODUS 30:30

Yes, dwelling together in unity is not just something given to us for our good and pleasant experience, but as our priestly ministry to God Himself! This cannot be emphasized enough: Dwelling together in unity is a sacred ministry we hold unto God and before all people! May the precious oil of His unity in our lives together proclaim Him.

But you are ... a royal priesthood ... that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 PETER 2:9

O how great Your excellencies, Lord God! May we depart the darkness of disunity and be drawn now to reflect only the marvelous light of our perfect oneness in Your Spirit.

RECEIVE THE BLESSING

Were this not already profound enough, David continues still.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! ... It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

PSALM 133:1, 3

Hermon being the highest peak in the region, “dew” would descend from the snowy mountain top as water to the lower peaks of Zion. Magnificently, David saw in the Spirit that our dwelling together in unity is one of the highest points in all God’s kingdom—yes, as Jesus later spoke, God’s very glory—touching

heaven itself. It is from this exalted place that the rivers and living water of Christ Jesus flow to all the land of God, from the richest to the driest.

Moreover, atop the holy mountain of Zion to which the Lord declared through His prophet Zechariah¹¹ that He would return, God revealed to David truth so profound that the weight of its glory can only be imparted to us fully by the Spirit of God: “For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.”

Where does the Lord command the blessing of life forevermore in our lives? In our dwelling in *unity*. In our life *together*. In our perfect *oneness*. In the good and pleasant place that words cannot describe, but that the Word invites us to begin experiencing today.

In other words, this dwelling experience is not only good and pleasant, nor is it just priestly—it is kingly! The house of the Lord is therefore not solely a house for family, it is a temple for priests who serve the High Priest and a palace for royalty who serve the King of kings. Here the King *commands* the blessing. There is no suggestion here, but only His authority and command for a life forever. It is only and always in His body that we will find such everlasting and abundant¹² Life.

¹¹ Zechariah 8:2-3

¹² John 10:10

To summarize David's beautiful revelation in Psalm 133, the late Christian preacher, C.H. Mackintosh had this to say:

This, beloved Christian reader, be assured of it, is the grand secret of getting on together. If brethren are to dwell together in unity, they must have the "ointment" and the "dew" dropping continually upon them. They must live close to Christ, and be occupied with Him, so that they may show forth His virtues, and reflect His blessed image.

Then, what joy to be enabled, in any little measure, to refresh the heart of God! He delights to see His children walking in love. It is He who says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Surely this ought to stir our hearts to seek in every possible way to promote this lovely unity. It should lead us to sink self and all its belongings, to surrender everything that might tend in any measure to alienate our hearts from Christ, or from one another. The Holy Ghost exhorts us to "endeavour" to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Let us remember this. It is the unity of the Spirit, not the unity of the body, we are to keep in the uniting bond of peace. This will cost us something. The word "endeavouring" shows that it cannot be done without sacrifice. But the One who so graciously exhorts us to the

service will ever supply the needed grace. The ointment and the dew will flow down from Him in refreshing power, knitting our hearts together in holy love, and enabling us to deny ourselves, and surrender everything which might tend to hinder that true unity which we are imperatively called upon to maintain.

C.H. MACKINTOSH ON PSALM 133¹³

This brother's passage was inspired by the Spirit of God, undoubtedly, for it testifies powerfully of Jesus Christ.¹⁴ This may not feel entirely practical on its own, though. In times of trouble, we all require more specifics to the application of maintaining our unity in the Spirit than this. Fortunately, there is indeed more instruction available to us, for God's Living Word has spoken and continues to speak it. May we hear Him only growing more clearly as we continue our search for wisdom in the Way.

¹³ http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/mackintosh/Bk6/DEW_HERM.html

¹⁴ Revelation 19:10

CHAPTER 3

HEED OUR CALLING

Should we choose to venture into the gathering places of the family, seeking to dwell together in unity as brothers and sisters in Christ, we must first recognize our roles as sons and daughters of the Everlasting Father.

Abba asks, “Who are my children?”

“We are,” we reply.

As only our Father can, He now gently but firmly directs, “Prove eager to maintain the unity of My house!”

Again, we here return to the worthy manner of God’s calling in our walks.

I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called ... eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

EPHESIANS 4:1-3

Naturally, not all saints are “called” to the same exact effort of maintaining unity, as each of us have varying gifts and ministries. Whatever the effort that may be required of us each, whether we need only protect our hearts against discord or we are faithful overseers who have been called to the work of the church, maintaining unity will always take effort. It is work!

Therefore, if unity is to be maintained when conflict inevitably arises, God’s household must find itself ready and willing makers of peace, workers who serve its one and only Prince, whatever the cost.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons [and daughters] of God.”

MATTHEW 5:9

The entire narrative of the Story is filled with many great peacemaking examples, for in scripture we find the Good News of Peace.¹⁵ Yet, while we may intellectually agree that peacemakers are indeed blessed, we must press in even further to uncover God’s wisdom for *how* such sons and daughters might go about making peace. For though our job is only to *maintain* the unity that has been given to us, we indeed have a part in *making* peace.

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:15

It is here that we begin with the practical side to maintaining our family's unity in the Spirit. And as all great pursuits begin, we start with prayer.

Lord God, Prince of Peace, we pray that Your peace would fill us and go before us, that Your Spirit might instruct us how to apply the Word into our shared experience and expressions of Your church. We desire to live together peaceably with all, especially our brothers and sisters in Your body, as You have made possible by the work of Your cross. May we be humble to receive Your instruction and wisdom as we dwell together in the good, pleasant, priestly, and kingly house of God. Amen.

RECOGNIZE OUR FAULT

As we begin to investigate the practical side of maintaining our unity in the Spirit and making peace, we must remember that this is a two-way street. Just as we will be deeply hurt, offended, and even sinned against by our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will assuredly hurt, offend, and sin against those within the church as well, regardless of our intentions.

Offense begets offense, and therefore, it is rare—though not uncommon—for one to remain innocent while the other is found at

fault. At some point, we have all mishandled our unity in the Spirit rather than maintaining it.

In more familiar words, “All have sinned...” As such, may we all read what follows here as instruction in both circumstances, whether we are the offenders or the offended. We must all acknowledge and thank the Lord for His forgiveness as we strive to maintain our unity together.

SHOW GRATITUDE FOR THE GIFT

When children are given good gifts, the joy of their faces as they unwrap such presents is return enough for a parent to spoil them undeservedly. “Thank you, thank you, thank you” a giddy child might squeal with delight, jumping up and down upon realizing what she now possesses because of the unconditional love with which she is loved.

Any parent will agree that the opposite side of that coin is quite a disappointing one to experience. When a parent lovingly wraps a present, eagerly anticipating the child’s reaction and response to it, only to instead witness a face that looks confused, maybe even disappointed, how disheartening a scene!

Unity in the Spirit is one of the greatest gifts we have been given as the children of God, yet we often fail to thank our Father for it as we should, let alone enjoy it. Perhaps we may individually give brief and perfunctory thanks for the gift of our unity, but like a child who has forgotten his or her once-shiny toys, we bury it within the closet to collect dust, failing to enjoy that which is ours forevermore.

While we will agree again that our unity in the Spirit is imperishable, we assuredly underappreciate and mishandle this beautiful aspect of our inheritance in the saints. Our opportunity is to instead do what all children do with their most cherished gifts: enjoy it!

To begin, we ought to excitedly thank the Giver of our unity, Christ Jesus, just as a child would his or her parents on Christmas day. Recognizing this is not just a gift to us as individual children but a gift that has been given to *all* children of God, we should then share it with our siblings and talk excitedly about it with them, in awe of the supernatural force by which we have been forever united.

But most of all, we should use it. We can here and now press in to the depth of relationship that Christ has granted us all by the work of His cross and the power of His Spirit. In doing so, should we have the faith and inner strength, together we will apprehend

“what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that [we] may be filled with all the fullness of God.”¹⁶ Indeed, what more might we ask for or seek out than His fullness.

BECOME EAGER

Since we know that being “eager to maintain the unity in the Spirit” is an aspect of our walking worthy, we must first discover this eagerness. True, eagerness is not a word we may use often these days, but it is one that reveals the very heart of the Lord for our unity. In older translations, the word “endeavouring” was used instead, further demonstrating that our effort to maintain unity is one that will require labor, diligence, and endurance.

Perhaps we will find a word that more suitably expresses God’s desire for us in synonyms of “eagerness”: ambition, excitement, fervor, hunger, longing, thirst, yearning, zeal, earnestness, quickness, vehemence, intentness, etc. Is it our *ambition* to maintain our unity? Are we *excited* to maintain our unity? Do we *hunger*, *long*, *thirst*, and *yearn* to maintain our unity? If we are zealous for the Lord, should we not find the same *zeal* to maintain His gift of glory, even when it feels impossible?

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:18-19

If this is not yet our attitude toward our unity for one another, we must only ask for the Lord's help in this, like the needy father¹⁷ who recognized his own lack of belief. Lord God, please grant us Your eagerness for our unity, so that we might faithfully maintain it.

PUT ON LOVE

As believers, we often speak of the necessity and primacy of love, yet it is imperative that we not only say we love one another, but prove so in our actions¹⁸. Of course, loving some brothers and sisters may be more challenging than loving others. Paul understood this as he wrote to the church, knowing that there are two primary ways in which love might be formed between us.

First, Paul sought after, even fought for the saints to be “knit together” in Love.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love....

COLOSSIANS 2:1-2

¹⁷ Mark 9:24

¹⁸ 1 John 3:18

This knitting together is a work only Jesus Christ can do as we hold fast to Him¹⁹, bringing together the parts of the body that are necessary for it to function as it should. This work of God is required for our physical bodies to function²⁰, and thus, it is required for the spiritual body of Christ to function.

Of these supernatural fusions, perhaps there is none greater than that which David experienced in his relationship with Jonathan, whose souls were knit together by the Lord in an instant.

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul... Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

1 SAMUEL 18:1-4

What we find here is a beautiful image of God's love that should resound within us for one another. Indeed, we should pray for this supernatural act of the Spirit to knit us to each other, followed by our commitments to love one another at all times.²¹

¹⁹ Colossians 2:19

²⁰ Psalm 139:13

²¹ Proverbs 17:17

Why did Jonathan strip himself? Because He replaced what He was wearing with love, instead. In such fashion, we too shall find ourselves laid bare before one another, with nothing left to give one another other than our very hearts.

While sometimes such knitting together proceeds our putting on love, other times we must first strip ourselves bare of all our inadequate garments to replace it with love. Paul knew this birthplace of unity, as well.

Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

COLOSSIANS 3:14, NASB

While this particular act may not be instigated by a supernatural knitting, it is no less supernatural when we choose to lay down our own lives for one another and replace our own positions of power for positions of submission. Jonathan did this very thing. Rather than keep on his garments of power—his robe, his armor, his sword, his bow, his belt—he stripped himself even of his position as heir to give it to the one God had anointed. O what Love!

In the absence of a supernatural feeling for which it is unwise to wait, sometimes we must begin by *taking off* our pride, our

impatience, our self-service, our loose tongues, our expectations, and whatever else hinders our experience of unity, choosing instead to *put on* love for our brothers and sisters. As we do this and hold fast to the Head of Christ Jesus together, we will indeed be knit together.²² May Love clothe us.

²² Colossians 2:19

CHAPTER 4

SURRENDER OUR POINT

Paul urged the church in Ephesus to live together “with all humility.”²³ Unfortunately, it seems Christians today have become rather numb to such language. While humility is foundational to the Way in which we should walk, more practically speaking, this requires we very often *not* make our points with others, instead surrendering it. The question with which we must wrestle is rather simply worded, but a difficult match once met: Do we care more about being right, or being united in Spirit?

This is not to say we should avoid speaking the truth in love, which we will consider how to do with one another soon enough, but we should absolutely concern ourselves more with how we love each other than what we know better than each other. The only point we should resolutely seek to prove is our intention for peace.

Maintaining our unity is a continual act of maintaining our humility and regarding others as more important than ourselves,

²³ Ephesians 4:1-2

just as Christ did. By Paul's own account, he would have rather avoided any activity if it were to cause stumbling—which is division—among other brothers. His words bore weight.

Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:12-13

Paul cared less about being right when compared to the glory of remaining as one in Christ, even when he knew he was right! What a Godly example we have been given, one to imitate indeed.

In Acts, we find yet another example of such humility.

Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

ACTS 18:24-26

Rather than come against what Apollos said about the baptism of John and criticize his lack of knowledge, Priscilla and Aquila walked a more excellent Way. They “took him aside”—meaning they did not try to make their point in public, we should duly note—to explain things to their brother “*more* accurately.” In other words, they did not look for where they disagreed with him, but rather where they could encourage his further growth in Christ. Praise God for such a humble daughter and son!

Unfortunately, what we see modeled today is quite contrary to this example. Even as the church commonly preaches about love from the pulpit to the pews, we seem to much prefer, practice, and prioritize knowledge. While in Christ we might discover both all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge *and* the breadth and length and height and depth of love²⁴, we must never forget “knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”²⁵ Or, if we prefer more emphasis, we read later in the same epistle.

And if I have ... all knowledge ... but have not love, I am nothing.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2

²⁴ Colossians 2:3, Ephesians 3:18

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 8:1

Lord Jesus, may we remove knowledge from the pedestal upon which we have placed it and exalt You instead, remembering that it is because of the Father's love for us that we have Your life, and in our love for one another that all will know we are Your disciples. May we be *something* together because of the Your love's *everything* in us.

BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER

Akin to humility, “patience” too is a word that has been watered down to lack its apparent impact within Christian culture today. Perhaps we should return instead to an older translation of this Ephesians passage in which we find God's call to maintaining our unity.

... with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

EPHESIANS 4:2-3, KJV

While patience might elicit head nods and eye rolls, “Yes, we know we need to be patient,” the word *longsuffering* gets to the very core of Paul's urgent exhortation to the church. God does not desire our patience when it is convenient for us, nor does He

cautiously suggest, “Try to be patient just a little while longer.” He calls for our longsuffering with one another, forbearance, and endurance with one another.

But what of the practical side to this? Surely this goes easier said than done. Well, patience is a fruit of the Spirit, and hence, we should ask for more! Our Father knows how to give good gifts to us, and how much more will He give the Holy Spirit and its fruit to those who ask of Him!²⁶

Further, we should request to have the eyes of the Lord for our brothers and sisters. It is without question that there are those within the church who need extra doses of grace, who perhaps even rub us the wrong way in every regard. May our tempers not run high nor our patience run low, instead taking the lowly position to allow His patience to fill us to the brim. May we see others as God sees them, made in His image and one ... with us.

In most families, there are usually some weird uncles or odd aunts. May we focus not on what we cannot stand about them, but let our love stand firm. Since love is the perfect bond of unity, we must always remember where such love’s practice begins: “Love is patient....”²⁷

²⁶ Luke 11:13

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:4

HONOR OUR BOND

“Bond” is a word with multiple definitions, but all definitions serve the common idea of joining something together. We might specifically think of the bonds of friendship or a strategic alliance, but it could also refer to the bonds formed by securing compounds, adhesives, or chemicals.

Throughout scripture we find a great many references to the term “bondservant,” which describes an agreement between masters and slaves with legal force during those times.²⁸ Whether by the force of its master, as was often the case then, or by the willing submission of a slave, men and women would become servants to those who held their bonds. Make no mistake, though many remain enslaved by sin, we have instead become slaves to Christ, who is our Peace! As such, we are now bondservants of Peace, and therefore, have an obligation to fulfill the call of our Master.²⁹ Part of that calling is to our maintenance of the unity of the Spirit.

The issue today is not that unity is looked down upon—quite the contrary, in fact. Unity is something that is talked about rather fondly, but when it comes to maintaining it, we forget by whom

²⁸ *Doulos*, the Greek word for bondservant, is used 127 times in scripture

²⁹ Ephesians 4:3 encourages our action “in the bond of peace”

and what force we have been bonded. We have been bought by Peace. We are in service of Peace. We are called to Peace.

Despite the power of this bond and the truth that we were saved upon its binding, it is easy to forget to honor it. Or rather, we often fail to recognize Christ as our Peace. Unwisely, we prioritize serving ourselves and our own desires rather than serving the Prince who paid for and has eternal right to our bond.

Practically speaking, to maintain unity, we must begin with repentance to our Bondholder and return to our Master, realizing the importance that He has placed upon our unity with one another and how peace plays an integral part to the work He has for us. Why would we not? For Christ has chosen to call us much more than His bondservants—He calls us His friends.³⁰

ENGAGE GENTLY

Walking “with all ... gentleness”, too, is a part of our calling and one of the key practices to maintaining our unity in the Spirit. Solomon provided us great insight as to how this trait will simply but effectively work to our advantage in maintaining the unity of the Spirit.

³⁰ John 15:15

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

PROVERBS 15:1

In other translations, the word for “gentle” here is exchanged for “soft.” Softness is something too rarely commended in church culture today, especially within the American church. “Be strong” we preach, wrongly believing that machismo is God’s purest idea of strength, when gentleness is what He truly desires.

This is not to say forcefulness has no place in us, but as citizens of the Kingdom, we should readjust our perceptions, allowing the Lord to open our eyes and tune our hearts to His definition of true strength. For just as the wisdom of this world is folly with God³¹, the strength of the world is weakness with Him. In making peace and maintaining unity, this will often require our soft answers and gentle tones instead of harsh words and strong tones.

Gentle words are a tree of life....

PROVERBS 15:4

May the authority and life of His gentleness increase in us.

³¹ 1 Corinthians 3:19

CHAPTER 5

LIVE DEPENDABLY IN PEACE

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

ROMANS 12:18

How far will we go to live peaceably with all? Of course, as Paul here wrote, it is not always possible to live peaceably with all. For example, there are many whose eyes have not been enlightened to the unity we share and its urgency to our calling. But let us be certain that, with God all things are possible³² to those who have been called according to His purpose.³³ And what a purpose it is, eternal and magnificent, far beyond our wildest imaginations and explorations.

Therefore, so far as it depends on us, we must test the limits of our walk, the very borders of God's love in us, and seek to live peaceably with all whom we encounter. There are far too many

³² Matthew 19:26

³³ Romans 8:28

Christians these days who have misinterpreted the Gospel's warning that we would be hated for the sake of Jesus³⁴ to mean that we need only seek to live peaceably with the people we like and who like us.³⁵ We have not so learned Christ!

As much conflict as He continually encountered, Jesus was growing in favor with God and with man.³⁶ We must not ever leave man out of the picture, for it is part of God's magnificent obsession to unite all things to Himself.³⁷

LET PEACE RULE

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

COLOSSIANS 3:15

How can we make peace with one another during conflict if we are not experiencing His peace in our hearts? While we can rest assured in the peace God has made with us, we must never stop seeking the fresh filling of His peace *in* us. Especially when peace

³⁴ Mark 13:13

³⁵ Matthew 5:46

³⁶ Luke 2:52

³⁷ Colossians 1:20

with other believers feels strained, it is critical that we cast this care—and all cares—upon the cross of Christ.

In the midst of conflict, we may find ourselves preparing for the worst possible outcomes. But it is critical that we never lose our hope or stop praying for the very best. This is not to say we should anticipate or assume the worst of another person—may it never be! But, when fearing the worst outcomes, we should pray with faith and hope that God would take our anxiousness upon Himself and allow Him to work in the situation. There is nothing He cannot do. We are instructed to cast all our cares upon Him, and this goes for our relational cares, as well.

In all of this, may we take hope, for God cares even more than us that our unity be maintained. We must trust that He is at work, whether we see Him moving or not, letting Him rule over our hearts and our concerns. It is from under His rule that His inner peace will manifest itself outward.

PURSUE THE THINGS OF PEACE

Peace may feel like an enigmatic and intangible pursuit on its own. Paul's letter to the Romans addressed this very concern.

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

ROMANS 14:19

This begs the question, though, what are the things which make for peace?

First, let us consider a treaty. It is rarely in the times of great battle that treaties are formed, only surrender. But it is indeed the times of peace in which alliances and treaties are created, as to protect against future wars between nations. The same wisdom can be applied to our relationships. Rather than waiting for times of conflict to form peace, may we do everything we can to establish peace with one another in the times without conflict, encouraging and edifying our family members always.

Of course, there are a great many other forms of pursuing peace. Pursuit in and of itself means we are heading a specific direction together. We must not let our relationships remain stagnant, but instead walk the same way, seeking to build up one another.

Words of affirmation, prophecy, teaching, and prayer are among those listed in 1 Corinthians which we know are edifying to one another and the entire church. Beyond such things, we can rather simply look to the courtesy of treating others how we want

to be treated³⁸, giving gifts for one another, writing encouraging notes, spending time together, accompanying one another to our favorite activities, and more. In short, “the things of peace” are most simply described as the things of friendship. Given any opportunity to pursue friendship together, we should seize it. In doing so, we will make for peace.

PROTECT AGAINST DISCORD

While much of the church has left her protection to those who have been “qualified” to the work of the church, it should not be so. *Every* member of the church has been qualified to protect the church, even if we do not individually aspire to oversee it.³⁹ While some men and women of God desire this noble task, we are *each* responsible for overseeing our own hearts and ensuring that we not allow seeds of discord from being planted or growing within us.

To accomplish this task, whether overseeing a particular community of the Lord or simply overseeing our own hearts, we need spiritual discernment. Discord is not something that immediately reveals itself, but it is at first small, even invisible to the naked eye. To see it, we require the eyes of the Lord to search

³⁸ Luke 6:31

³⁹ 1 Timothy 3:1

our hearts, and for us to work in partnership with God to ensure that any resentment, bitterness, or other discord is uprooted like an evil weed. There is no place in our hearts for discord as we let the Lord reign over our heart.

Practically speaking, we need only ask, “Lord, is there any area in which discord is currently—or at risk of—growing in my heart?” Sometimes, the revelation of that discord will come to others with spiritual discernment, and in such circumstances, we should listen to them. Whatever the case, we must trust that God’s hatred for discord and division is so great that He will indeed reveal it as we seek to maintain His glorious gift of unity.

There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him ... one who sows discord among brothers.

PROVERBS 6:16-19

May we incline our own heart to the hatred of His towards discord. And more importantly, may we never be the one who sows such discord among others.

AVOID DIVISIVE BEHAVIOR

Accusation is Satan's game.⁴⁰ Division is his aim. Oftentimes, the enemy uses believers—even well-intentioned brothers and sisters—to accomplish his goals. Scripture is quite clear on the sin of such division.

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

TITUS 3:9-11

Warped, sinful, condemned—these words are no light matter. For clarity's sake, let us recognize that a “divisive” person is not a person with whom we simply disagree or lack uniformity in our thoughts and theologies. No, this is about those who actively work to divide the body of Christ and set brothers and sisters against one another within the family of God. This is someone who makes believers think they need to pick sides, rather than realizing we are all on the same side and united in the Spirit, already having been made perfectly one.

⁴⁰ Revelation 12:10

Before this extreme warning, however, Paul's letter to Titus enforces that there are many other worthless actions among which we may often perpetrate, even if we are not intending to "stir up division." O how many foolish conversations in which we entangle ourselves! Paul adamantly opposed such behavior within the church.

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-18

May we never require the warning of other family members and simply heed this warning of scripture now to avoid such foolish behavior, seeking continually to live as one with the body. Let us leave division to the devil and find ourselves commended, instead.

ACKNOWLEDGE THE WARFARE

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,

against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

EPHESIANS 6:11-12

When we are at conflict within the family of God, we must remember at all costs that they are not the enemy. Our division against one another is yet another scheme of the devil trying to distract us from the prize we share in Christ Jesus and the inheritance we have been given in Him, of which our unity is but a part. Therefore, when anything comes against us, whether it feels like an inconsequential concern or a crushing attack against our unity, we must recognize it as exactly that: an attack.

As such, the best thing we can do to seek peace is to fight for it in the spiritual realms. This may require the earthly actions of doing anything it takes to make peace with our brothers and sisters, never giving up on one another. Or it may very well require prayer and fasting with other saints, requiring the weapons and armor of God Himself to wage war against the enemy's plans.

There is a common saying today that *freedom is anything but free*. For example, as much as Americans may have fought for their independence hundreds of years ago, they must continue fighting for it to remain free. Such is the same upon the battleground of unity. While we are already one, we must fight to

preserve our perfect oneness. For as lovely a blessing as unity is among brothers, it is an even more necessary quality among warriors. May we fight for peace together as one, never losing sight of the cause for which we struggle.

CHAPTER 6

BE RECONCILED

As ambassadors, we have been given a message.

... that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-21

Of course, this message plays a fundamental part of the good news of exceedingly great joy that we have been given to share with others. Scripture has much to say about the world's reconciliation to God.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

COLOSSIANS 1:19-20

While our reconciliation to Christ is of first importance⁴¹, our reconciliation must not end there, either. We are also to be reconciled to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ! The Word is clear.

So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

MATTHEW 5:23-24

The profundity of this passage cannot be overstated. God desires us to be reconciled to one another before we acknowledge Him with our sacrifices. John puts it even more plainly:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot

⁴¹ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

1 JOHN 4:20-21

We cannot say “I love my brother” if we remain unwilling to reconcile with them, no matter how great the offense against us. If there is anything estranging us from the unity we have been called to share together, our reconciliation is God’s mandate. Or as Paul encouraged the Ephesians:

Be ... forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

EPHESIANS 4:32

Of course, there is more to reconciliation than simply saying, “Be reconciled,” but it begins with our obedience to the call. To maintain unity in the bond of peace, we *must* be reconciled. Christ commands it, just as He will command the blessing when we obey.

AIM FOR RESTORATION

Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11

While many Christians conceptually understand and even seek reconciliation, restoration is the target that extends beyond reconciliation, regularly forgotten or unknown. According to Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, reconciliation stops at "the action of making one view or belief compatible with another," restoration is "the action of returning something to a former place or condition." Therefore, while we may have reconciliation with one another, this does not mean that we have achieved restoration, where the relationship might again find itself in the place it was before, if not an even better place.

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.

GALATIANS 6:1

After a transgression, especially one against us that feels personal in nature, it will be difficult to consider how we return to what once was. We may find ourselves desiring reconciliation, all the while feeling a great grief over what was lost. Praise Be to God that we serve Him who was, is, and ever more shall be! May we too aim for nothing less than the perfect and gentle restoration of what *was* so that it might be what *is*, just as He has renewed and restored us in the same spirit.

ASSUME THE BEST

When we have been offended, even wounded by a fellow brother or sister in Christ, we are given the opportunity to take one of two postures toward them. Either we can make assumptions about their heart, thoughts, and intentions toward us, or we can assume the best about them as it relates to us. How do we benefit in thinking otherwise, especially knowing that such inner turmoil and poor assumptions may only cause greater strain between us?

Jesus took this posture even in His final breaths, not only assuming the best of His accusers' hearts, but even forgiving them without so much as an ounce of regret.

And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

LUKE 23:24

What a response, O Lord! This is the posture of death to self that Christ always took and that we have been invited now to take with Him. May we be so loving and well-assuming as this, even asking the Lord's forgiveness if we *do* know our offenders' ill-intent toward us, remembering always the extent to which we ourselves have been forgiven.

REACT SLOWLY

The book of James is filled with hands-on wisdom, encouraging throughout that we be “doers” of the Word, not merely “hearers” of it. Yes Lord, may we truly be doers.

... let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

JAMES 1:19-20

What we find in this passage is not a blanket exhortation to always speaking slowly, but a how-to guide in responding to conflict. Of course, we need not require slowness to anger in every response, for most conversations among family should not kindle any anger whatsoever. But when another person, especially a believer, speaks or acts against us in a way that stings or even cuts, the fleshly response would be to lash out in anger. Naturally, we will be tempted to respond by speaking evil against the person who has given us “reason” to do so.

The practical aspect to maintaining our unity—and composure—in such cases is to give considerable pause, even distance and time, before we speak. It is in the momentary seconds and minutes of our reaction that we are given the preeminent

opportunity to maintain our unity with one another. What we say and how we deliver it in those moments will mark our maintenance—or mishandling—of our unity in the Spirit.

Jesus modeled wise responses firsthand for us. The Gospels frequently cite the crowds, Pharisees, and Sadducees who tried to trick or capture Him in His response. Yet His wisdom and submission to the Spirit's leading would always turn things in His favor. While He did not necessarily grow in favor with the religious heads of the day, He surely astonished most others with His wisdom. Even upon betrayal, we witness His wise response.

Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; seize him." And he came up to Jesus at once and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you came to do." Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.

MATTHEW 26:48-50

Jesus could have responded quickly, rudely, even angrily to Judas—and been justified in His anger! But instead, He referred to Judas how He thought of Him *before* such betrayal, as a "friend." This is indeed gentle and patient, a worthy example of our calling.

“But,” we might retort, “that was Jesus. Of course He responded wisely!” Scripture responds.

By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

1 JOHN 2:5-6

If we require any further evidence of this exhortation, we need only read Solomon, who wrote regularly of the wisdom to be found in our slowed reactions. In fact, it is a pervasive theme throughout all of Proverbs.

- Proverbs 10:19: When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
- Proverbs 11:12: Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.
- Proverbs 17:28: Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.
- Proverbs 16:32: Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.
- Proverbs 17:27: Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

- Proverbs 18:2: A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.
- Proverbs 18:13: If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.
- Proverbs 21:23: Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.
- Proverbs 29:20: Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

Practically speaking, if we have been offended, maintaining our unity may require that we allow days (and nights) to pass before we respond to familial conflicts. David too gave some of his own responses time, even while his anger was present, refraining from the temptation to sin.

Be angry, and do not sin; ponder in your own hearts on your beds, and be silent.

PSALM 4:4

“Got it,” we mutter. “Understood,” we affirm. Yet, it is in the testing-fire of misunderstandings, disagreements, insults, accusations, lies, slander, persecutions, and other grievous words and actions against us that our tongues and reactions prove our

heart's most eager desire. Will we seek to defend ourselves, or will we defend our unity?

Reading on in James, the common sense author concludes his earlier point rather bluntly.

If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

JAMES 1:26

May our hearts not be deceived nor our religion be found worthless, but may our bridled tongues talk worthy of one another, as our feet, shod by the Gospel of peace, walk worthy.

CHAPTER 7

RESOLVE CONFLICTS QUICKLY

Though we ought to respond slowly when mistreated, we are called to resolution quickly should we have mistreated others. After commanding our reconciliation to one another, Jesus provided even further wisdom in the event of conflicts that move beyond relational offense and into legal territory. If we are being accused—or if we are willing to extend mercy to those whom we are tempted to accuse, as we should—Jesus gave clear instruction.

Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison.

MATTHEW 5:25

What common sense Christ offers! To keep peace and unity, sometimes it requires we derive a speedy resolution to the situation, even when it costs us something, so that it might not become worse.

Time can indeed heal wounds, but for some, it can cause them to fester. When there is unforgiveness, especially, we should resolve the accusations at hand with haste, not giving the devil any opportunity to drive greater division between us. Again, it is the enemy who accuses and divides, and we must protect against such situations, oftentimes as quickly as possible.

KEEP PRIVATE

No one likes their wrongs to be placed on display. Scripture offers great wisdom about beginning difficult or potentially embarrassing conversations privately at first. If we have been wronged by another believer to the degree that it will require discussing it, it is important to do so privately, one on one. In the case that more than two parties have been affected, it is critical that all who need to resolve the matter be present, as well.

Of course, there are a great many more circumstances we encounter that may not at first feel like they require resolution. We can—and should try to—always let things go first, which is part of our bearing with one another, most assuredly. As peacemakers, this should be our regular attitude and attempt.

However, though love keeps no record of wrongs, if we do recognize a pattern or topic causing distance or discord between us

or the assembly of saints in which we gather, it is important to discuss and resolve the matter as promptly as we recognize any hurt, resentment, or bitterness surfacing. For example, if a loved one does something that bothers us, but we feel it is inconsequential enough, we should let it go, no questions asked. If it happens again soon after, bothering us further or even hurting us, but we still feel as though it would cause more division than unity by bringing it up, we should forgive our family member and continue on with them. If this becomes a pattern, however, and we find our hearts continually stung and struck every time it occurs, it is critically important to address the matter and resolve it with one another.

We must never choose to gossip about the hurt we have been caused, but always instead keep the matter private. If there is any love, as we bring our hurts before one another, there will be forgiveness and a greater experience of unity that quickly follows the respect we demonstrate toward one another like this.

MEET IN PERSON

Granted, we would not have as much of the New Testament as we might think were it not for church conflicts being resolved by

ink and papyrus. However, in this age of easy transportation, we have a more excellent way.

In the instance of facing a conflict that requires personal resolution, it is imperative that we seek to be with one another face-to-face, rather than sending written messages to one another. Inundated today by text messages, emails, social media, and other forms of digital communication, this may run counter to our culture or personal experience. However, written messages simply cannot convey the love to be seen in another person's eyes or the care to be heard in another person's tone. Even more importantly, one-way communication cannot give way to true dialogue and conversation, which is required for true restoration.

There are other practical considerations, as well. We should give others the necessary time to process their own feelings, we should involve neutral mediators if it makes others feel more comfortable, and we ought to find locations conducive to our conversations.

In all of this, if we are truly eager to maintain the unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace, we should also be eager to discuss those matters face-to-face, as brothers and sisters who dwell together in unity.

RESIST NOT

“But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.”

MATTHEW 5:39, NASB

As respectable men and women of God, very few of us have likely encountered an outright physical assault against us. However, this scripture does not call us simply to act as pacifists in the face of physical harm—though it is this author’s humble opinion that this too is our calling. No, Jesus speaks primarily here to those who encounter verbal assault. There is no slap against us that will not shock us, but what we do in return is where we shall see Peace made manifest.

This beautiful chapter of our faithful fellow minister of the Lord, Frank Viola, well encapsulates the spirit behind turning the other cheek:

Jesus talked a lot about losing, taking up our cross, denying ourselves, and laying down our lives.

These are the fruits of brokenness before God.

It’s not hard to spot a Christian in ministry who isn’t broken. Unbroken people don’t know how to lay their lives down and lose. They only know how to try to win.

If they're criticized, they retaliate.

If they're attacked, they return fire. If misunderstood, they defend in anger.

They are capable of doing all sorts of damage to others in order to save their own ministries and keep their reputations. On the contrary, people who have been broken by the hand of God know how to turn the other cheek. They know how to go the second mile. They know how to give their coats when asked for their shirts. They know how to speak well of those who misrepresent them. They know how to return good for evil.

They know how to lose.

And in so doing, they exhibit the Spirit of the Lamb and allow God to win.

In the words of E. Stanley Jones, "The God I find in Christ is a God who overcomes evil with good, hate by love, and the world by a cross."

Again, it is through the wounding and the breaking we experience that the life of Christ can be released through us.

And that is where the secret of fruit bearing lies.

FRANK VIOLA, GOD'S FAVORITE PLACE ON EARTH

In all this, do we believe that God will avenge, or that we must?

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

ROMANS 12:19

We can either believe Him or not. We can either have faith in the Lord's justice or man's. We can either lose our life and save it or try to save our life and lose it.⁴²

As we walk in the Way of grace, may we not turn up the heat of our own anger in response to others, but simply turn our other cheek instead.

⁴² Matthew 16:25

CHAPTER 8

SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...

EPHESIANS 4:15

While making for peace will very often require us being slow to speak or remaining silent altogether, making peace will just as often require us speaking the truth frankly and graciously. For some, this will come more naturally to their character, while for others, this will run counter to their very personalities.

On the spectrum of peacemakers, there are very many who will tend toward saying nothing at all that might offend or be found a sensitive subject. These men and women among us are often gifted in the body of Christ as mercies, evangelists, shepherds, servants, helps, et al. Meanwhile, there are a great many others who tend toward speaking truth with very little seasoning of grace, often

found to be abrasive or even hurtful. These are often the apostles, prophets, teachers, exhorters, and leaders⁴³ among us.

Proscribing these extremes, God has called us to both truth and love. These are not mutually exclusive or in conflict with one another, but perfectly represented in Christ, who is both the Truth and who is Love. Should we seek Him in our pursuit of unity, we will find both working in harmonious concert together.

Walking in unity is part of our walking in maturity. Therefore, for us to gain maturity and walk in the unity God has already granted us, we must speak truth in love one to another, just as we have been commanded. Therefore, when presented with a need for perhaps difficult truth, we should carefully consider not just what we say, but *how* we say it. Oftentimes, it is not the content of our message in which we might offend our brothers and sisters, but in the delivery of our content. In other words, truth is typically revealed in what we share, while our love is typically revealed in how we share it.

Of course, there are many who can speak hurtful words in a very “loving” tone, but we must be completely void of this. As a

⁴³ While leaders have a throbbing heartbeat for corporate unity, in walking toward the vision that God has given them to take hold of, they can sometimes leave some individual saints behind in their incessant march for the kingdom.

result, we need God’s wisdom in both what we share and how we share it, which brings us to our next point.

GET WISDOM

The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

PROVERBS 4:7

While the points in this brief guide and in scripture itself offer us helpful instruction, we need the indwelling Word of God to truly light and direct our steps⁴⁴ so that we might walk worthy. Not all situations are the same, and therefore, we need to seek the wisdom of God during such conflict.

Fortunately, we serve a God who grants wisdom generously and without shame to we who need it.⁴⁵ Seeking His wisdom is critical as we seek to make peace, for as Paul instructed the Romans, we must “Never be wise in [our] own sight.”⁴⁶

This brings us to an age-old question: what are we listening for when we seek wisdom from God?

⁴⁴ Psalm 119:105

⁴⁵ James 1:5

⁴⁶ Romans 12:16

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.

JAMES 3:17

While we could focus on each of these aspects of the wisdom from above, let us particularly focus on four distinct practicalities of the wisdom which we lack without Him.

First, the wisdom God offers us is pure, just as He is pure. In other words, when seeking His wisdom, we must seek wisdom not only for our own gain or so that we might be justified. No, we must ask for wisdom out of the intent that we maintain our unity. As we offer up our cries for wisdom in this heart, He will hear us and respond with a wisdom just as pure as our heart.

God's wisdom is also reasonable. When we go to resolve a conflict with someone, we ought not go in with unreasonable assumptions, expectations, or demands of our brothers and sisters. Reasonability demands that we consider how we ourselves would like to be treated and do nothing beyond that which we would desire were we to sit on the other side of the table, even if we are the one who has been offended. If we have wronged anyone, we must consider how we might reasonably respond for our wrongdoing and ask nothing wild of our family.

Mercy is not just hinted at in God's wisdom, but filled with it. Not partially, not mostly, but filled with mercy, God's cup of wisdom overflows. May our mercy overflow in such a way for one another, even if we have been sinned against, forgiving our family members mightily, submitted to the bond of peace that bought us. To do so, may we simply consider the mighty mercy which has been already granted us.

Finally, the wisdom that awaits us is without hypocrisy. For example, it never expects something of another without expecting something of ourselves, either. Should we wish for apologies, then may we be first to apologize if there is need. Should we hope for justification, may we allow and recognize another's justification. Should we hope that others assume the best of us, may we first assume the best of them. May all our wisdom be without hypocrisy, both in the light and in the shadows, before the world and before the Lord.

Though wisdom from above awaits us upon request, we have also been given the opportunity to seek out those who also have access to such wisdom. May we indeed seek the wisdom of many counselors and spiritual warriors. Of course, this must never amount to disguised gossip against others, but in those whom we have confidential audience, let us seek their wisdom and fervent

prayer as we also seek to make peace with others in the interest of maintaining our unity with all.

PRAY CONTINUALLY

We may only recognize prayer as a spiritual act, but our eyes must be opened to the practicality of its application, as well. When meeting those with whom we have conflict to resolve, we should absolutely pray before we meet. Fasting may even be appropriate depending upon the gravity of our situation. As we meet with our brother or sister, though, we should also begin and conclude such a meeting in prayer.

Our prayer to begin this meeting should be for peace, clarity, restoration, and above all, love. If we begin in this way, it is not to say that things will not be difficult during our discussions, but this will assuredly set the holy tone for such a conversation. If the conversation becomes heated in the midst of our resolution, we should return again to prayer as one, thanking God for our oneness, praying that His oneness would be made manifest on Earth as it is in Heaven, and beseeching that the Prince of peace would rule over the continued time together. Finally, as our conversation ends, we must allow for prayer to conclude that which

has been shared, embracing one another as family should, and offering a blessing of peace before departing.

As we leave such trying conversations, we should pray to ourselves that the Lord would continue to rule over our hearts and not allow any lies or resentment to seep back into the situation, either in us or in our family. Jesus will surely reign supreme in those who come before Him in prayer continually throughout such hardship, for He sympathizes with us.⁴⁷

SHOW UNDENIABLE HONOR

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all... “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

ROMANS 12:17, 20-21

A love for honor is something that has proven quite lacking in western culture, especially as compared to the value that eastern cultures place upon it. Yet it is a virtue by which we may glorify our King and make way for peace.

⁴⁷ Hebrews 4:15

Simply defined, honor is high respect and esteem. Paul encourages the church here to not simply return evil for evil, as might be our fleshly reaction, but to intentionally consider how we might show respect and esteem to others, even those who have committed evil against us. O how counter to the culture!

Showing honor to others, even when it is “undeserved”, reveals great faith in the Lord’s justice far surpassing our own. Once we grasp this truth, we will discover the joyful opportunity to so confuse those who stand against us with our response that the world will stand in awe.

Practically, this requires our intentional consideration about how to overcome evil in such a way that as anyone hears or sees our good—evildoers included—no one will be able to criticize how we have responded. This does not entail a simple “I love you” response or silent response, but an outdoing one another⁴⁸ in such reactions *and* actions that all will acknowledge the honorable response we have offered. Perhaps that is washing someone’s feet upon their injuring us. Perhaps it is blessing a brother in response to his or her cursing us. Perhaps it involves looking for public opportunities to acknowledge the good within others so that even

⁴⁸ Romans 12:10 reads, “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.”

those set against us might no longer speak one word of harm without feeling the pain of it within their own hearts.

Whatever our response to others, it should be something to which we have given careful thought, our heart, words, and actions showing honor to our wrongdoers in ways that there can be no response given but that of awe to the God who loved us even as we, too, were enemies to Him.⁴⁹

REMEMBER OUR ADOPTION

We have already established that peacemakers are sons and daughters of the Most High. Unfortunately, this can be easy to forget when in bleak situations. Where things look hopeless, we must remember the Hope that is inside of us and that we have been adopted.

As we remember our place in the house of God, that He declares the glory of His own unity within our very DNA, and that He is well pleased in us who boast the Spirit of His Son, we will take up fresh vigor and vision for maintaining such treasure. Undoubtedly, peace is not the easiest path to walk, but it is the path we have been called to walk upon in a manner that is worthy. May we be worthy of He who has called us, not by our own doing,

⁴⁹ Romans 5:10

but because of His working in us to will and act according to His eternal purpose.⁵⁰

LOOK TO THE CROSS AND THE TOMB

... let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross....

HEBREWS 12:1-2

Unity looks like a magnificent and resurrected body, but often sounds, smells, and feels like a dreadful cross. As much as we may believe we are eager to maintain our unity in the Spirit, this requires we die to ourselves as Christ did. It is in these tribulations with one another in which our faith will be perfected, as we are accused, bruised, beaten, and crushed by those we love. There is no getting around this painful joy⁵¹ set before us—maintaining our unity in the Spirit requires we lay down our lives for our friends, and sometimes even our enemies.

But in such greater love⁵² for one another, whether our siblings (or we!) are weaker, wrong, or woefully misguided, we will surely

⁵⁰ Philippians 2:13

⁵¹ Hebrews 12:2

⁵² John 15:13

discover the triumph of an empty tomb soon thereafter. It may not be tomorrow, or even the next day, but someday on this side of heaven, the power of Christ's resurrection Life will be made visible in our shared experience together, as we endeavor to walk worthy of God's calling.

To return to David's testimony, it is as we endure this bloody cross and witness this empty tomb that we shall behold the blessing commanded by our King on the mountains of Zion, Life forevermore. Amen!

CHAPTER 9

LEST WE NOT FORGET

As we seek to maintain our unity, there is far more wisdom that awaits us in the Word both written and Living than can possibly be described in these pages alone. However, it is this author's hope as a son of God, peacemaker, and fellow warrior for unity that His heartbeat for our perfect oneness is both explained and encouraged within every saint who reads this work.

Lest we forget, may we now give final summary and continued intention to all that we have considered together, putting into action all these ways and more in which we might maintain the unity of the Spirit. Lord, please help us:

- Behold Your glory
- Practice unity, not uniformity
- Dwell together
- Minister as priests
- Receive the blessing

- Heed our calling
- Recognize our fault
- Show gratitude for the gift
- Become eager
- Put on love
- Surrender our point
- Bear with one another
- Honor our bond
- Engage gently
- Live dependably in peace
- Let peace rule
- Pursue the things of peace
- Protect against discord
- Avoid divisive behavior
- Acknowledge the warfare
- Be reconciled
- Aim for restoration
- Assume the best
- React slowly
- Resolve conflicts quickly
- Keep private
- Meet in person
- Resist not

- Speak the truth in love
- Get wisdom
- Pray continually
- Show undeniable honor
- Remember our adoption, and...
- Look to the cross and the tomb

As difficult as it may be, in the best and the worst of times with our brothers and sisters, we must always remember that we will inevitably experience conflict. No family is without it. Of course, we can expect most of our time together will require no more of us than enjoying our unity in times of peace. Still, other times will demand we work diligently to make peace as our unity is mishandled. In both seasons, faithfulness beckons us.

It is the very glory of Christ for which we now peacefully fight to maintain, the sign by which “the world may know” that God sent Jesus and loved us even as He loved His only Son. To this we are forevermore called and by this we are now known, sons and daughters of the One true God—He in us, and us in Him.

In everything, let us continually fix our eyes upon He who has called us, setting our aim on nothing less than Christ Himself. For it is the Worthy One who has placed in us the desire to walk in such a manner in the first place. He is our Prize, and it is in

exploring the depths of our ultimate Treasure that we will surely discover the equally divine breadths of our perfect oneness in Him. For this—amen, for Him—may we always remain most eager.