

THINGS THAT MAKE FOR UNITY

(Adapted from an article written by David Lipscomb, GA, June 14, 1909)

The great curse of the church of Jesus Christ is division. Jesus foresaw that strifes and divisions would be the weakness of the church and the curse of a lost world. Jesus said that his people would be the "light of the world, the salt of the earth." Whatever dims that light, or weakens that power, destroys the church's influence, injures the world, and ruins people's opportunity to be saved.

Hello I'm Larry Murdock. I preach for the Gandy church of Christ. Good morning and welcome to this program.

Jesus Christ foresaw the problem of division. He poured out His soul to God and besought earnestly that His disciples "might be one," that all who believe on Him through the words of His apostles "may be one, even as we are one." Why did Jesus pray so earnestly about unity? So "that the world may believe that you have sent me," He said. (John 17:20, 21)

It is clear that Jesus believed division of his followers would keep the world from believing in Him as the Son of God.

It is no wonder then that the apostles of Christ condemned division and strife. Not only would strife among believers keep the world from believing but it would ruin the hearts of Jesus' people. Strife causes corruption in the human heart. It causes heartache. Strife defiles relationships. It makes us unfit to approach God in prayer. Do you remember what Peter wrote about husbands and wives and their relationship with one another? He said, "Husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." (1 Peter 3:7) When the atmosphere of a marriage is strained, it hinders the prayers of a Christian. If that is the case with two people in marriage, then how many more prayers would be hindered when there is strife in the church?

Jesus once said concerning Satan's kingdom, "a house divided against itself cannot stand." (Matthew 12:25) Would this also apply to the "house of God"? Jesus' apostle Paul wrote to the church of God in Corinth, "I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no

divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment." (1 Corinthians 1:10) Then Paul asked in verse 13, "Is Christ divided?"

The church is the spiritual body of Christ. If Christ is not divided, then surely the members of that body should not and must not be divided! When we fight to maintain our divisions we deprive the church of the power to teach its members or teach the lost.

The Master and his apostles not only warn against division, but they also give directions how to avoid this threatening, fatal, and fearful danger. The Master and his apostles tell us how to maintain the unity of the body of Christ. Jesus prayed to his Father, "I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.... (14) I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (17) Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (18) As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. (20) "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, (21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (John 17:8-21)

If Christ's followers could only learn to speak where God's Word speaks, and keep silent when we have no Word from God! Division is caused when we misinterpret God's Word. Most of the time division is caused by not hearing God all the way through. A public worship service should be the one place in the world where believers can come together. But what do we see in the world? We see multitudes of groups of believers who cannot worship together!

Shouldn't a worship service promote unity among believers? Shouldn't worship services be simple and non-intrusive of any believer's conscience? The teaching you hear in a worship service or in a Bible class should come from the Bible. The preaching you will hear in a worship service should be the teaching of the Bible. Who would object to singing praises to God without an instrument or a band, or a choir? Who would object to communing with Jesus in the Lord's Supper on the

first day of the week? Who would object to offering the Supper to every person in the audience, allowing each believer to judge oneself as to whether he or she is acceptable before God to partake of the communion? Yes, in a public assembly of believers we should give the apostle Paul's warning when he wrote, "Whoever...eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged." ([1 Corinthians 11:27-31](#))

And so in churches of Christ you can find the bread and the cup of the Lord passed to all, asking each one to "examine himself". To me, it would be a fearful thing to withhold the supper of Jesus Christ from a believer because that person is a stranger to that local church. But yet, so many churches practice what is called "closed communion." That means that only members of that church can partake of the Lord's Supper. It means that you have to be on that church's list or you will be prohibited from partaking of the Lord's Supper. There is no scripture that authorizes this practice. That false doctrine may go back to the false manmade idea that only an ordained priest or minister can administer the Lord's Supper. Well, the Bible teaches that every Christian is a priest. That means that every Christian should have the obligation of determining their fitness for partaking of the Supper. Does that mean that some Christian may partake of the Supper and be condemned by the Lord in doing so? Yes. Some Christians may be eating and drinking condemnation to themselves! That is a terrible danger! But still, that choice of partaking or not partaking must be made by the individual Christian. There is no authority from God for an eldership or a preacher to decide who can partake of the Lord's communion. Friends, "closed communion" divides believers!

I made the statement earlier that a worship service should be "non-intrusive" of any believer's conscience. What would make a worship service "non-intrusive" of any believer's conscience? Surely we all would agree that a believer's conscience should be formed by God's Word. Don't we believers believe the Bible is God's Word? Jesus said to His heavenly Father, "I have given them your Word." "Sanctify them through the truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17) Worshipers who promote unity among believers should hear the Word of God in worship

services. The Christian's conscience should be formed by the Word of God, which is the truth. If a believer's conscience is formed by God's Word then that believer will rejoice at hearing and studying the Word of God. If a believer's conscience is formed by God's Word, then to hear God's Word would be "non-intrusive." And if God's Word should convict me of wrongdoing, then surely the one who believes God's Word will rejoice in learning how to correct his thinking or his life. Someone told me one time that I did him the most good when I "got on his toes." He meant by that statement that God's Word, passed along by me, was convicting him to change his lifestyle. Isn't the Scripture supposed to be correcting me?

The apostle Paul listed the benefits of God's Word to Timothy, when Paul wrote, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)) Yes, the church needs to hear every "breath" of God, everything He has breathed out. God's Word is profitable for teaching. So many preachers do not teach the Bible! It is also profitable for "reproof." Reproof is a retest. Reproof is checking our lifestyle against God's Word. Comparing it. Seeing whether or not we are living according to the truth. When we find our lives out of harmony with God's Word we can then make "correction." The Bible is good for "correction." Finally, the apostle said God's Word is profitable for "training in righteousness." Righteousness is justified behavior. Well, who has the right to justify behavior? God has that right! He made us! Psalm 119:172 says, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments *are* righteousness." ([Psalms 119:172](#)) Every behavior God has ever commanded is justified. Righteousness is justified behavior and God's Word is good for training in that kind of behavior that pleases our loving heavenly Father. Yes, God's Word does all these things. It is no wonder that every worship service should be characterized by the teaching or preaching of the Word of God. For the assemblies contain the people of God and potential people of God who need to be complete, completely equipped for every good work.

Churches of Christ believe in the unity of all believers. To prove that we practice simple, scriptural, worship services around the Lord's Table that no believer could object to. We invite all believers to come, let us worship the Lord together.