

“That We All May Be One”

My discourse this evening is the 1st in a series of occasional Sunday Evening messages by the elders, for the purpose of – Leading the Flock in Truth so “That We All May Be One.”

As bishops ordained by the Holy Spirit, we take very seriously our responsibility as overseers and pastors in feeding and leading the Flock that is among us, that all may receive a crown of glory that faded not a way.

Our plea is; as believers... “we will work together and have all spiritual things in common,” as the early church; sharing and participating with one another in faith, i.e. continuing steadfastly in fellowship — assembling together often — edifying one another in love — working and walking together — being led by the Spirit of God unto the common salvation.

With this in view — prompted by our sincere love and concern for all the saints at Riverside Road, the elders believe it is high time to give serious consideration to various issues concerning the future of the Lord's Church in Ozark, MO.

Our first concern is that we never forget the Lord's admonition that even though we are individually responsible to God for our own salvation; we still have a collective responsibility, as a congregation, to develop and maintain a mature church with a unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; that the world may know that Jesus our Savior is the son of the living God.

The elders are also concerned about the recent enactment of anti-godly laws in many states disguised as “equity and freedom” issues. We feel an urgency to prepare this congregation to be a “united” voice of advocacy for truth... ..standing firm in the face of possible legal penalization, which could include incarceration.

A more personal concern of the eldership, at this time, is my age... which is advancing beyond the biblical allotment of threescore years and 10; therefore, the elders believe it is most judicious that the congregation be seriously considering and preparing for future leaders.

Based these concerns, as well as other situations that may impact the future of this congregation, it is very importance... “That We All May Be One.”

And, this was our Savior's concern, as He ardently prayed for His apostles and all believers in the 17th chp. of John vss 20-23... “That They All May Be One.”

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Jesus was praying “that all believers may be consummated as one, being glorified in Jesus Christ by God's great love; thereby, witnessing to the world that Jesus is the son of God.”

This intercessory prayer of Jesus, shortly before his crucifixion, is of critical importance to the well-being of the Lord's church.

If we have any hope of sharing the glory of God in eternity, we must strive to **do our part** to be one — just as God and Christ is one.

Brother Clayton recently presented an excellent lesson on the motive, nature and attitude of being one in Christ as taught by Paul in Philippians 2:1 – 4.

“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, — then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. DO NOTHING out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”

This Scripture is an **excellent admonition** for us to study to achieve unity in Christ.

Clayton reminded us of the compelling motivation to be one in Christ — by considering the benefits in vs.1 — which should prompt a Christ-like attitude (vs.5), i.e. a humility of mind that considers others better than our self. This will effectively motivate us to be of one mind with common goals and interests — sharing together the same love of God and truth — united in spirit and being intent on one purpose, i.e.

“Helping one another make it to heaven.”

Thank you, Clayton, for a very timely **preface** to this proposed series of lessons. By the way, he was not aware the elders were working on these lessons. However, I suspect that he and other members may have some of the same concerns as the elders; WHICH IS GOOD.

The elders strongly encourage every member of the congregation to listen, read and reflect on each lesson in this series. Copies of each discourse will be available for all, especially those who were not in attendance to hear the lesson.

As already mentioned, the elders will be occasionally presenting lessons in this series as they are developed during the 2nd half of 2011.

Each discourse will be composed and scripted by mutual agreement of the eldership. This will help minimize personal bents and prejudices that we all have.

During each original presentation, time will not allow for comments or questions. However, the elders strongly encourage all members to carefully and prayerfully consider each lesson in relation to the overall intent of this series and feel free to present questions or comments to the elders, either separately or together.

In order to develop and understand the full implications of “All Being One in Christ,” it is necessary to consider and discuss various questions and topics as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

As Clayton demonstrated in his sermon, as human beings we all have different ideas and opinions on many things in the world and I might add, arguably, many things in the church.

Therefore, it's going to be important that we consider the will of God, i.e. His words and laws for his chosen people, as revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

Many questions need to addressed, i.e.

How can we **be one – as Christ and God are one?**

What does the Bible teach about **fellowship?**

Are we under law? If yes, what law?

What are the differences between **Old Testament laws** and **New Testament law?**

What is the **“Law of Faith?”** Or, the **“perfect law of liberty?”** Or, the **“law of the spirit of life?”** Or, the **“law of sin and death?”** Or, the **“law of righteousness?”** Or, the **“law of Christ?”** Or, the **“law of commandments?”** Or, the **“Royal law?”**

What does it mean to **“serve the “law of God” with the mind?”**

What are the implications of **legalism**?

What does the Bible mean "**love covers a multitude of sins**?"

And I'm sure there will be other areas of concern as we continue to develop this series and we are open to your suggestions in this regard.

I believe the following 3 questions will help focus our hearts and minds on the necessity of – **Being One in Christ and God**.

- 1) How can these lessons help develop strong leaders, i.e. servants, as described in 2nd Timothy 2: 24-26?
- 2) How can these lessons prompt us to be a mature unified congregation that reflects the glory of God and the sonship of Jesus throughout our community?
- 3) How can these lessons produce a close-knit community of believers that can endure future trials as good soldiers of Jesus Christ?

Hopefully, this provides an idea of the content and intent of the proposed series of messages that will follow.

During the remaining time of this lesson, we will consider –

How we can become one - as Christ and God are one.

This may seem like an impossible task requested by Jesus in John chapter 17, **but we know it is not** — because God does not require us to do that which we cannot do.

Unarguably, we human beings cannot be one in every aspect as Christ and God are one – primarily, because of our sinful fleshly nature. However, when Christ was in the flesh upon this earth, He and His Father were totally one – because of His infallible fleshly nature –

(1 John 3:5 – “...in Him there is no sin”) & (Rom 8:3 – Notice “...God... [sent] His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh...” Likeness means in the **resemblance of** sinful flesh – Jesus did **not** have sinful flesh – until he bore **our sins** in his own body on the tree – 1st Peter 2:24.

Also, Jesus had **complete** knowledge of God from before the creation of the earth. Therefore, He is the brightness of God's glory and the express image of God's person, and he upheld all things by the word of God's power (***Hebrews 1:3***).

Therefore, the degree of unity of believers in Christ can only be commensurate with their limited knowledge of God in Scripture* and creation and their anointing of the Holy Spirit as a royal priesthood (***1 John 2:20; 1 Peter 2:9***) ****Now we know scriptural knowledge is sufficient unto salvation – 2 Peter 1:3.***

Under the new covenant, we **can be one** in Christ and God by the **renewal of our mind** and the **cleansing of our heart**.

Listen to the promises of God regarding his new covenant...

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Heb 8:10)

“...let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.” (Heb 10:22)

This **grace-induced unity-in-Christ** helps us to be **like-minded**, **having the same love**, and **being one in spirit and purpose**. (***Phil 2:2***)

The unity between Christ and God is a “totally perfect oneness” of their spiritual beings, i.e. heart, soul & Spirit. (***Jno. 10:30; 1 Jno 5:7***)

In a fleshly-limited sense, the unity of believers can only be achieved by consummation of our redeemed and renewed heart, soul and spirit as one body in Christ.

I realize this is not easy to grasp—partly due to my lack of communication skills. That's a good reason for you to have a printed copy – to search daily if these things be so.

Now, let's think about some of the flesh-induced problems we face as we strive to be one in Christ.

In reality, does this “unity of believers” mean that everyone will understand the Bible exactly alike?

In answer to this question, I would like to summarize some excellent remarks made by Brother Rick Sparks approximately 25 years ago – that I think are worthy of our consideration. These remarks were made in context of a sermon on fellowship.

“I believe the Bible can be understood, and to the extent that we can understand it at all – we can understand it alike.

Now we may misunderstand it and if we misunderstand it then we are likely to misunderstand it differently. Or, we can misunderstand it alike as well.

But if you and I do not see it alike, at least one of us is misunderstanding it and the reason I believe that is because the Bible is revealed to us in proportional truth and I do not believe – in any given Scripture – God is saying one thing to one person and something else to another person in that same passage of Scripture.

In his revelation, God is not the author of confusion. He is saying the same thing to all of us and the ideal is that all of us will understand it, but the reality is we don't see it alike.”

And I agree with what Brother Rick is saying – he continues as he addresses a large gathering of the church in Des Moines Iowa...

“Within these walls, this afternoon, there is a divergence of opinion over numbers of issues. There are different thoughts in this auditorium in the minds of those who are present – thoughts that are strongly held – over...

– Whether, or not, a Christian has the right to kill in war, or even the obligation to kill in war.

There are differences of thought about –

– the proper understanding of divorce and remarriage

– with women's participation in the meetings of the church

– about financial aid by the Church to non-Christians

– about whether an elder should resign if all his fellow elders resign or die

– whether a man can qualify for eldership with one child

– whether an elder's children must be baptized believers

– whether the Holy Spirit dwells in the child of God

– whether there is such a thing as evangelistic oversight... ...to mention just a few.”

And I might add, there are, no doubt, differences of opinions among the members here at Riverside Road on these same issues and many others. Listen as Brother Rick continues...

“And there are many more than that, as you well know, and so the ideal is that we will all understand it. God is saying one thing and to the extent that we can understand the Bible – we can understand it alike and we can talk in ideal terms all day long – and it's a beautiful mental exercise – but when we get down to where we live the reality is – we don't see it alike.

And the further reality is – we can't be sure who's right or who's wrong – whether we like it or not.

All I really have with which to make such judgments and decisions is not really the Bible – but my own fallible understanding or misunderstanding of the Bible.

That's what I have to go with and I have to do the best I can with it."

Now I agree with Rick – based on a conditional statement he makes later in his sermon – i.e. he is, basically, addressing areas of disagreement that we should allow our brothers or sisters to hold -

- however, these are not areas that deny the facts of the gospel. The facts of the gospel are something that we would have to be in full agreement about, or else we wouldn't even be in fellowship in Christ in the 1st place.

With this thought in mind, listen as Rick continues to talk about problems related to having differing opinions...

"Well, of course I happen to think that my judgment is the right one. I really do. And that just bothers some people to no end.

Every once in a while my wife will say to me, well you just always think you're right. Well, how can you respond to that, of course I think I'm right, if I thought I was wrong – I would change until I thought I was right. So, obviously, if you're giving thought to an issue and you come to any decision at all, obviously you think you're right.

This really bothers people – I talk to people all the time – they will say the thing that bothers me about you is that you think your church is the right church –

– and I say, do you think your church is the wrong church?

Wouldn't that be amazing to go up to people and say, well, I think I'm in the wrong church and I want you to be in it to. Of course I think I'm right.

It's no crime. And furthermore, it's no crime to be right – not at all.

We've all got the right to be right, but the rub comes on down the line – somewhere – when we get in contact with other people who do not share the same view about it.

The only higher authority we have to go to is the Bible – that's where we have already been – so we go back to the Bible and we carefully and prayerfully and earnestly investigate it – and we still come up with divergent views on the issues that I've mentioned, as well as other issues.

None of us would say that every false position taken by another person makes it impossible for us to be in fellowship with him.

For all of us have our own little doctrinal deviations which we can tolerate.

So for all of us it is not a question of whether we can be in fellowship with someone who is wrong – but it's a question of which subjects he can be wrong about and still be in our fellowship and there is the rub. It's here that our thinking often becomes fuzzy – because it is colored by our past experiences and relationships."

And I agree with Brother Rick's thoughts in this area.

This is not a new situation. It has been this way as long as fallible human beings have interacted with one another on most all subjects.

This is where we all must work together in humility and love, i.e. **"...in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Let each of you look out not only for your own interest, but also for the interests of others." (Philippians 2:3–4)**

As we close this 1st lesson in this series entitled – "That We All May Be One" – let us take one more look at the words of Jesus in John chapter 13 shortly before he was crucified.

After Jesus identified Judas Iscariot as the one who would betray him – Judas departed and Jesus proceeded to instruct the remaining disciples.

Notice what He told them as part of his last message in verse 33...

“Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you.”

We need to pay very close attention to what Jesus felt was very important to say to them?

Listen to vs. 34 and 35...

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; [How?] as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

Brothers and Sisters – this is how we are to live together in unity – by loving each other with the same attitude of love Christ had when he, in grace and mercy, submitted to that awful death on the cross to save sinful people.

– He continues with the following proposition...

“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is one of those plainly expressed facts of the gospel – that is self explanatory –

Now it's up to you and me – to accept and execute the Lord's proposition, i.e. to love for one another as Jesus loved us.

Finally, we must all give heed to the plainly expressed admonition of the apostle Paul, as he instructed the Christians of Philippi – that the only way they could be one in Christ was by having the same lowliness of mind and loving concern for the interest of others as Christ Jesus had for us.

Remember the statement we made earlier; “we can only be one in Christ and God by the renewal of our mind and the cleansing of our heart.”

Therefore, I urge every member of our congregation to make a special effort to search their heart, mind and soul to be sure they have put on the new self which is created according to God in true righteousness and holiness by the renewal of the spirit of your mind and that you truly have the mind of Christ in you – so **“that we all may be one”**– in Christ and, thereby, show the world that Jesus is the son of God that can save our souls.

May God’s riches blessings be upon each precious soul in our Christian family, as we help one another along the narrow highway to glory.