

A PERFECT EXAMPLE

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:30-33

The Apostle Paul was the incomparable master of illustration in his teaching and preaching. His clarity and intensity draw the hearer's attention and make his point plainly understood. Especially graphic is the relating of marital conjugation with the affinity of the church, the Body of Christ. The closest relationship with which the human mind can identify is that which exists between husband and wife. Thus Paul appropriately applies the comparison: "For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

We who have received Him as Lord and Savior are *one* with Christ. We are indwelt by Him, identified with Him, submitted to Him. God is the Author of unity. Only by Him, through Christ, can a perfect state exist. What irony it is, that weak and puny man has the audacity to believe that by his own strength and ingenuity he can attain the unattainable by implementing his salvation apart from surrender to the one God and Father of all!

Man cannot please God in any way other than obedience to His will. Obedience to His will begins with acceptance of His love. It seems that man's most difficult task is that of accepting a gift of love; he prefers to barter for love rather than to receive it freely given. "Herein is love, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US, and sent His Son..." (I John 4:10).

REH

Notes:

EDIFICATION BY UNIFICATION

Scripture Reading: Romans 14:19

The fruits of unity are many and varied, and all are profitable. (We speak of unity under the law of righteousness; even the devil and his legions can be unified!) One of the great benefits is that of mutual enlightenment. When the minds of the saints are in synchronization, the truths of God are magnified; and He is glorified. Our apostle gives us many ground rules for the sharing of the faith. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16).

Most notable in the epistles of Paul (and much to the chagrin of legalists and religionists) is the lack of any instruction whatsoever in liturgical and/or ecclesiastical, ritualistic exhibitions. His exhortations to the Church, the Body of Christ, are in the light of praising and exalting Jesus Christ by way of expression from the heart, without benefit of equipment or paraphernalia. Fellowshiping in love, sharing burdens, preaching, teaching, evangelizing—these are the Apostle's desire for the members of the Body to recognize as their saintly responsibilities.

How simple are the principles of unity in the Spirit! Note that we did not say *easy*—but *simple*. We are not told that a life pleasing to God will be other than difficult, but we are given clear and unmistakable instructions. "Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance" (Colossians 3:23-24).

REH

Notes:

SEPARATION FROM AND TO

Scripture Reading: I Thessalonians 1:7-10

“And be ye separate, saith the Lord” (II Corinthians 6:17). God makes clear His desire for His children. He has provided for us a haven and would have us to occupy it exclusively. We need not be apart and adrift; we have a safe harbor in which to be securely moored. It is His will that we be separate *from* the world—separated *unto* the faith of Christ.

Any straying that takes place is on the part of man—not God—“with Whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17). God does not deal in half-measures: “For I am the Lord, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). Good and evil are as oil and water; they won’t mix. “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial [impure worship, cultism]? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (II Corinthians 6:14b-16b)

God is patient; God is tolerant; God is forgiving. But God is not condoning of mixture. He is unwavering in His requirements, which He sets forth in no uncertain terms; and when we are obedient, He is pleased. Representative of this are Paul’s words of commendation to the saints at Thessalonica. “Ye were examples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia....**YE TURNED TO GOD FROM IDOLS TO SERVE THE LIVING AND TRUE GOD.**” “Idols” may be many things—not only graven images. Anything standing between God and His children breaks the perfect circle of unity. “*Whatsoever* is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23b).

REH

Notes:

THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

Scripture Reading: Romans 8:2-8

There are those who declare, “I was once a sinner, but now I am saved by grace.” There are others who confess, “I am only a sinner, saved by grace.” Our apostle makes unmistakably clear which of these statements is valid. As a saint of God, Paul bemoans, “I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing; for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Romans 7:18).

Those who claim to be in a state of “sinless perfection” will do well to heed Paul’s words. He goes on to say in verse 21, “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.” Pray tell, Mr. Self-Righteous, if you are without capability to sin, to what purpose does the Apostle plead with us to “be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2)!

Were we not still burdened with our body of clay, there would be no need for exhortations to perform that which pleases God. If we would preserve our joyful relationship with the Lord of our life, we must choose the walk, “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Romans 8:4b). Paul unabashedly confesses that he is incapable of victory by his own effort. Victory, nevertheless, is at hand. “O unhappy and pitiable and wretched man that I am! Who will release and deliver me from [the shackles of] this body of death? O thank God! He will through Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25a, A.N.T.)

REH

Notes:

PROOF OF PURCHASE

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 1:12-14

Only God can create a perfect union. In so doing, He does not settle for a portion; He desires the whole. He therefore pays in full, leaving no open clauses in the contract. God knows only completion and perfection; any deviation from these is of man's doing. As believers, our confidence is marred only by doubts and uncertainties of our own design. When we lack assurance, it can only be because we stray from concentration on the pure Word of God which provides complete consolation.

"After that ye believed [in Christ], ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory." If there is a more powerful passage than this in all of Scripture, we would be hard put to find it! The deposit, the "down payment," has been made to insure completion of the sacred transaction. Upon trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished, redemptive work on Calvary, we have received absolute assurance of our eternal salvation. The seal (Holy Spirit) is applied as an unequivocal and irreversible pledge that we will enter into the glory as permanent partakers of all spiritual blessings with Christ.

"Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (I Corinthians 6:19-20). "For our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:20a).

REH

Notes:

FLAWLESS FELLOWSHIP

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:17-19

Paul repeatedly pleads and prays for close spiritual relationship, in his own behalf as well as that of the congregations of believers. His personal testimony is filled with the expressed desire for continued faithfulness to be the ever dominant factor in his regenerated condition. He states that the purpose of all his distresses and sacrifices is "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Philippians 3:10). The Apostle's singleness of purpose never lost its focus. Even as he contemplated hardship and uncertainty, he persisted in total dedication to the consistent strengthening of the spiritual bond.

"None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). And, true to his word, he is later able to declare: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight. I HAVE FINISHED MY COURSE. I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:6-7)

Paul's desire is that all of us should follow his example. He beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). In order that we may be properly equipped, he prays for us, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith...that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

REH

Notes:

A PRAYER OF UNITY

Scripture Reading: John 17:19-23

Christ's intercessory prayer is filled with the plea for preservation of the unity, which it was His mission to establish. The essence of this prayer is the foundation of the spiritual relationship to be sought and secured by every believer. Even though His work was not yet finished, the power of the Holy Trinity had already prevailed. God's will and purpose has never been geared to the degree in which it has been revealed. It is accomplished by His decree in accordance with His program, and it is revealed in the time frame of His own choosing. The depths of unification communicated in this prayer were neither known nor understood by its beneficiaries.

The Lord Himself was the only being Who had no need to be purified, but He was the only One Who could perform that which could redeem the lost. "For *their* sakes I sanctify myself that *they* also might be sanctified through the truth...That *they* all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that *they* also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me. And the glory which Thou gavest me I have given *them*; that *they* may be one, even as we are one: I IN THEM, AND THOU IN ME, THAT THEY MAY BE MADE PERFECT IN ONE." What power is this!

Now the Lord Jesus Christ sits enthroned in glory, having suffered and bled and died and risen from the dead. "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures...was buried...and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:3-4). All this, that you and I might be one with Him!

REH

Notes:

THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:3-11

While suffering agony in the garden, Jesus prayed, "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless NOT MY WILL, BUT THINE, BE DONE" (Luke 22:42). Always, it is God's will that must be honored—not man's—if His purpose is to be faithfully served. When Judah observed religious rituals and festivals, God knew that they were cold and empty displays of formal worship devoid of heartfelt purpose. God responded sternly: "Bring no more vain oblations: incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting....And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you" (Isaiah 1:13, 15a).

Paul was intensely desirous that the saints should know and do God's will. To the Colossian church he wrote, "[We] do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord." And he frequently dealt in specifics: "In every thing give thanks: for this is THE WILL OF GOD in Christ Jesus concerning you" (I Thessalonians 5:18).

In his Ephesian epistle, the apostle adjured, "Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, AS UNTO CHRIST; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, DOING THE WILL OF GOD FROM THE HEART" (Ephesians 6:5-6).

REH

Notes: