

Food for the Flock

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"That They all may be One"

"The Greatest struggle has not been between religion and no religion; it is between God's religion and man's religion."
—Review and Herald, Jan. 13, 1930

"Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is 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 has sent me." John 17: 17, 23

Jesus prayed these words upon completing his earthly ministry in preparation to die on the cross. He knew He would not be long, physically, with his followers, and He poured out the burden of His heart for the believers that would remain. Jesus reveals in this prayer that He came so that mankind could know the one true God, who had sent Him to give eternal life to all who would believe. Christ, being mindful and fully invested in us and our future, asked God to bring the believers into unity. This prayer was not for the unbelieving, or simply for those who were with Him at that time, but for His followers in every succeeding generation, — the Christian church.

John 17:9, 20-23: *"I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are Thine... neither I pray for these alone, but for them which shall believe on me through their word; 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,"*

The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of God, affirms, "Now I plead with you brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you shall speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment... Is Christ divided?" 1 Corinthians 1:10, 13. "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism..." Ephesians 4:4, 5 "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints" 1 Corinthians 14:33

The apostles labored to keep the early Christians in unity,



"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall be one." John 10:16

of the same mind, doctrines and beliefs, yet even in their time there were challenges. Today we see almost an innumerable amount of denominations, sects and factions in Christendom— absolutely contrary to the oneness Christ prayed about.

Reason for Disunity

Paul exhorts; "Now I urge you brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Romans 16:17, 18

Peter seconds; "But there were false prophets also among the people, even shall there be false teachers among you, who privily bring in damnable heresies..." 2 Peter 2:1

In Paul's time the spirit of evil was working to cause divisions of which, in response to, he traveled, exhorted, rebuked, and set in order. But Paul, Peter, Timothy, and all the other apostles and disciples knew that it would only continue to get worse with time.

"But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn away their ears

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from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” 2 Timothy 3:13, 4:3, 4

God did not stop the introduction of error from entering His church, yet He set up a structure which if adhered to would eventually bring the church into the unity needed.

Ephesians 4:11-14: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

“Till we all come in unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...”

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, even Christ.”

The spiritual gifts are again repeated in the same order in 1 Corinthians 12:28: “And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, *then* healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues.” This order is significant in establishing their level of importance.

Prerogatives of the Spiritual Gifts

First God gave the apostles to establish a firm foundation for the Christian Church. The apostles were God-fearing only men, personally handpicked by Jesus. Their mission was to verbally spread and write the pure gospel.. “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, But by Jesus Christ, and God the Father...)” Galatians 1:1

Secondly, and of extreme importance is the gift of “prophecy”. Prophets were also chosen of God to rebuke, exhort, expound scriptures, prophesy, and send divine messages to the people of God.

Next in line are the evangelist, the pastors, and the teachers. They are to teach and instruct the word of God according to the principles laid down by the apostles, and the interpretations of the prophets. In view of this, notice how the gifts of ministers, teachers, miracles and healings, administrations and tongues only follow after, never before the first two gifts— apostles and prophets. Why is this

sequence necessary? The functions of the latter gifts prove useless without first establishing a solid foundation.

Evangelists, pastors, and teachers must admonish according to the Word written by the apostles and prophets. The administrations, teachings, ministries, and charities are vehicles to establish people in *truth*. Miracles, healings and tongues are supernatural designs to strengthen believers and draw non-believers to the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:6-12). Proponents who advocate one special gift over another, such as tongues or healings, without practicing and teaching according to the Word, are bound to mislead their followers.

Paul gives insight to the dilemma: “According to the grace of God which was given me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation and another builds on it. For no other foundation can any one lay other than which is laid, which is Christ Jesus. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.” 1 Corinthians 3:10-13

Moreover, religion is nothing more than divine knowledge, and put into practice will bring reform. Knowledge is progressive in nature, one fact connecting with another to complete a whole picture. So it is with true religion. Religion was designed to progress and meet the needs of believers in every generation, but during its progress, material (doctrine) has been used to build the church that is unsuitable for true spiritual growth. Uninspired, unsanctified men are causing “every wind of doctrine” to blow. However, Christ is coming for a spotless church! (Eph. 5:27)

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:.” Act 17:30. It is our duty, as Christians, to find out what God requires of us. Any attempts to build and unify apart from the truth and principles of God’s kingdom can only result in a religion directly in opposition to God!

The Pharisees, the rabbis, the Jewish nation as a whole, put their religious traditions and organization before truth and righteousness. They ended up crucifying the Messiah! How did their religion take them there? The Jews rejection of the prophecies caused their great fall from grace. Servants of God were calling them to the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the Messiah, yet it fell on deaf ears. They refused

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to accept evidence and search the scriptures to become followers of Christ!

The Gift of Prophecy Examined

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." Matt. 5:17 Jesus testifies the gift of prophecy and the law will extend throughout the ages. He fulfilled what the law could not do (atone for our sins). His victory at the cross ensures that the rest of the promises of redemption will be fulfilled. The gift of prophecy is included in the New Testament as an extension to the Christian dispensation.

The first division of the prophets prophesied "until John" (Matthew 10:13) meaning, before John they received the word directly from God through the medium of His spirit and hence wrote the scriptures. The second division is likewise appointed by God, imbued by the same Spirit, to interpret the writings of the prophets of the first division. As history shows, the prophets in the first division were not obliged to prove any part of their prophecies as the Word was dictated to them by the Holy Spirit, but, not so with the second division. They must prove their prophecies by the writings of their predecessors.

"To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." Isaiah 8:20

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost... For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" 2 Peter 1:20,21, Rev. 19:10

Men everywhere are endeavoring to fill the office of a prophet by interpreting the scriptures as they see it, but the word reveals that this should not be the case! If their testimony doesn't concur with the testimony of the former prophets and doesn't align us with the Law of God's kingdom, we should disregard them.

Truth Brings the Unity Desired

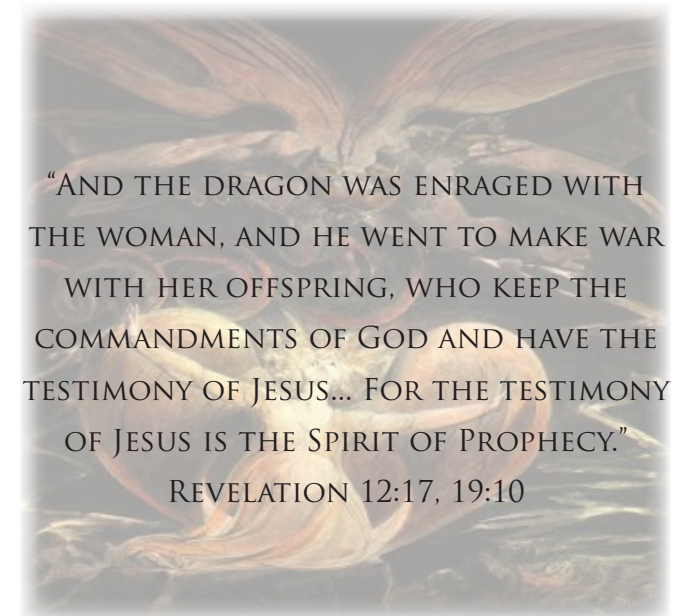
The use of the lesser gifts are exclusive to the correct foundation established by the first two (apostles and prophets). Many voices are now calling Christians to unite on common points of doctrine, pushing for the confederation of the churches, and doing so by the misuse of these gifts. Advocates believe this union will alleviate the stain of conflicting theologies and allow the Christian church to fulfill its mission to preach the gospel of the kingdom unto all the world. Yet, there are two things missing in this ecumenical agenda; biblical clarity in vital points of doctrine, and accurate interpretations of the

prophecies applicable to this time.

The prophecies correctly applied prepare the church to stand during perilous events ahead, such as the "mark of the beast". This mark will soon impact every living person and will distinguish those who will obey and fear God from those who fear the beast and its agenda. Before and during the time of trouble, theories and deceptive doctrines will be swirling around like the wind! (Daniel 12:10) We need to know the correct position to take so that we may withstand the test!

Should we neglect our personal responsibility to search the scriptures with integrity, we will fail of realizing the standard God has for us and His coming kingdom. It is only by seeking truth, led by the Holy Spirit, that one can align himself with the "oneness" of Christ's prayer. When believers come together, it will be because the Spirit of truth has led them into all truth. When the world sees such unity, built on the indestructible principles of God's kingdom, then and only then, will they believe.

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth... Sanctify them by thy truth; Thy word is truth." John 4:23,24, John 17:17



"AND THE DRAGON WAS ENRAGED WITH THE WOMAN, AND HE WENT TO MAKE WAR WITH HER OFFSPRING, WHO KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD AND HAVE THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS... FOR THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS IS THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY."
REVELATION 12:17, 19:10

Email us! Ask questions or just share your thoughts with us. We will try to answer them in future publications!

"Bigotry and intolerance, silenced by arguments, endeavors to silence by persecution, in old days by fire and sword, in modern days by the tongue."

--Charles Simmons

Food for the Flock: Matt. 10:34-38

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

"For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.

"And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

"He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

"And he that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me."

Although Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, in these verses the statements are clear; in following Christ, there involves a cross, and sometimes conflict.

The cross Jesus refers to is the experience that puts believers at variance with each other. To one, the truth convicts and brings repentance. To another it brings hardness of heart and condemnation. The two conflicting forces are pictured within families, even the same household. The word of God lays bare the intentions of

the hearts. When truth comes, how will we receive it?

We are warned never to surrender or conform to another's opinions or judgments just to bring peace, no matter what our attachments may be. On matters that have to do with our salvation, doctrine, and personal conviction, we are not to sacrifice our reason.

"As the student sacrifices the power to reason and judge for himself; he becomes incapable of discriminating between truth and error, and falls an easy prey to deception. He is easily led to follow tradition and custom... The mind that depends on the judgment of others is certain, sooner or later, to be misled." --Education pp. 230, 231

Our relationships with each other can only be sound if we first understand our relationship with God. It is Jesus only, who died for us, who deserves the devotion which follows without question. We must be able to stand for what is right, even at the cost of our lives.

"...Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." Jer. 17:5