

## *Unity, part one (SLIDE ONE)*

**Intro:** Put yourself in the first three or four centuries of the Christian church. You have no Bible other than the Old Testament (and maybe not all of that), plus a few books here or there, some of them from apostles and some of them, frankly, spurious, false. The books you consider sacred are generally speaking the same ones the people a hundred miles from you consider sacred, but there are significant differences between your groups because of this or that book or teacher.

There is a myth that is too widely believed (and it has nothing to do with nutso conspiracy stuff ala Dan Brown). It is that the early church didn't have our problems – they were united. They were early on in the stream of Christianity so they were purer, more united, and didn't suffer from all the divisive tendencies we have.

Oh... if only we could return to those halcyon days of yore!

Except they didn't exist. The level of diversity among Christian believers even in the first 150 years is staggering. Paul writes the Corinthians several letters. We have two of them – enough to see that some Corinthians didn't believe that God was the only god, others had weird ideas about marriage and divorce, others were turning the worship into a competition for attention – an American Idol where everybody auditions at the same time, and others questioned who really had authority in the church (but were pretty sure Paul didn't).

And Paul never, ever, considered separating from them. He called them brothers and sisters, fellow workers, friends, and beloved.

Unity has never meant full agreement.

Unity has never meant uniformity.

### **I. The Early Restoration Movement**

**A.** When the restoration pioneers worked on restoring the NT church, they allowed for a huge amount of variance in belief and practice.

**B.** Baron Stone and the deity of Jesus, the necessity of baptism.

**C.** Campbell and the baptism letter.

**D.** Women preachers, premillennialism, gifts of the Holy Spirit... and yet unity.

### **II. The Rule Book on Unity vs. The Missing Books**

**A.** I wrote a blog a couple of weeks ago about the missing books in the Bible. It engendered a great deal of comment, email and

reaction. Fact is, we often act like we have found those missing books.

- B.** The Bible has the rules on unity. In a Bible that never gives us those “missing” books or even describes an acceptable worship service, a whole chapter and a half is given over to a treatise on unity.
- C.** The following are commands – not suggestions – and they are as binding as commands concerning baptism or faithfulness.

### **III. Romans 14-15:7**

- A.** Romans 14:1 –(SLIDE TWO) do not pass judgment on disputable matters.
- B.** 14:3 – (SLIDE THREE) we are not to look down on someone because their conscience allows them to do what we do not do or because their conscience does not allow them to do what we feel we can do. (dancing, drinking, clapping, raising hands, speaking out)
- C.** 14:3 – God has accepted the one whose conscience differs from yours.
- D.** 14:4 – (SLIDE FOUR) We are not in a position to judge another who is serving God. God will make sure that they will be able to stand before Him. We don’t have to sort it all out down here.
- E.** 14:5 – (SLIDE FIVE) While we are not to force others to think as we think, we must be convinced in our own minds. (the louder we get, the more we doubt)
- F.** 14:9 – (SLIDE SIX) Christ died to save feeble, faulty mankind. He did not expect perfection. That is why there is grace.
- G.** 14:10 – (SLIDE SEVEN) Our turn to answer God is coming. Remember not to judge more harshly than we want to be judged.
- H.** 14:13 – (SLIDE EIGHT) We are commanded not to pass judgment on each other. Our judging and quarreling make our brothers stumble.
- I.** 14:15 – (SLIDE NINE) We are not on earth to distress our brothers.
- J.** 14:19 – (SLIDE TEN) Make every effort to do what leads to peace and building each other up.
- K.** 14:21 – (SLIDE ELEVEN) Alter your life, if you must, to keep your brother from falling.

- L. 14:22 – (SLIDE TWELVE) You do not need to tell everybody what you think about everything.
- M. 15:7 – (SLIDE THIRTEEN) Accept each other as Christ has accepted you.

**IV. The Sum of This Matter**

- A. (SLIDE FOURTEEN) Romans 14-15:7 is doctrine and we will treat it as such at Rochester.
- B. (SLIDE FIFTEEN) The abuse of the second commandment – Exodus 32:5. God is not controllable, predictable, understandable.
- C. Those in the first centuries – including the Corinthians – were loved and accepted by God, and by Paul, even with all their differences and difficulties.
- D. (SLIDE SIXTEEN) As said in another context: what God has joined together, let no man put asunder.