

Return To Unity



Sermon
By Derek Prince

In the sight of Jesus there is only one church on earth. It's not a Catholic church, it's not a Protestant church, it's not a Baptist or a Presbyterian or an Anglican church; it's His church. And I believe He's very jealous that it should be His church and His alone. More than 20 years ago in the last church which I pastored I used to talk about my church. But one day the Lord spoke to me and He said, "Would you mind telling me whose church it really is?" I had to stop and think and I said, "Lord, I hope it's your church but I'm not too sure." And that really cured me of trying to put my label or my ownership on any section of the church of Jesus Christ.

I talk about return to unity because it's very clear from the record of the book of Acts that the church began in unity. Let me read you just a few Scriptures that state this very clearly. If we go to the birth of the church on earth which is described, I believe, in Acts 2:1, it says:

> "When the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

They were united. And then a little further on in the same chapter, after the Holy Spirit had fallen and multitudes had been converted, inverses 44–47 it says:

> "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided among all as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart..."

Notice it was with one accord. They were all together. That's how the church was born.

And in Acts 4:32, a little later on in the record of the church, it says:

> "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he

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> possessed was his own, but they had all things in common."

Very clear that they were just one body, one group of people.

And then if you think about Paul's letters that he addressed. For instance, he wrote the church in Corinth or the church in Thessalonica or the church in Philippi. He never wrote to the Baptist church in Corinth or to the Anglican church or the Catholic church; there was only one church. He didn't have to label it. An interesting question would be if Paul were alive today and wrote a letter to the church in Singapore, where would it be delivered? Who would get it? I just say that to point out to you how far we have moved away from the pattern on which the church was established.

I'm not trying to make you feel guilty; I'm not even trying to make myself feel guilty. We're not responsible for centuries of history. We may suffer the consequences but we are responsible for our own actions. But we are responsible for how we respond to the situation today and what steps we take concerning the situation.

One thing is obvious. When Jesus comes back He's coming back for a united church because He's coming back for a bride. The church is His bride. And I think we'd all agree Jesus is no bigamist, He doesn't have two brides. He doesn't have a Catholic bride and a Protestant bride. So, somehow between now and then the church has got to be identified as the group of people who collectively will become the bride of Christ.

Perhaps this seems so far away for some of you that you think it's impossible, it's unrealistic. I would say just what Jesus said. With men this is impossible but with God all things are possible. My personal conviction is if God has said He will do something He will do it. I don't question it. I need to know how He will do it and I need to know how I will respond to what He will do. But I will not question that He is able to do everything that He has said.

One of the very important revelations contained in the book of Acts, chapter 3, is that the present age is going to end with a period which is called the period of restoration of all things. And when people ask what is restoration, my definition is restoration is putting things back in the right place and in the right condition. And I believe that's what God is going to do with His people. According to my understanding of the prophecies of the Old Testament, God has a people to whom He is related by a covenant that He will never break and that people's name is Israel. For 18 centuries or more they've been out of the place that God had appointed for them. But in this century God has been putting them back in the right place. I hardly need to point out to you that there's a great deal of opposition to that. Because, there are forces that will oppose the things that God intends to do.

Tonight I'm not going to be speaking about Israel but I'm going to be speaking about God's covenant people, the church. My personal conviction is that just as Israel has for about 18 centuries been far outside their God-given inheritance on the earth, so the church for just about the same period has been outside of its God-given inheritance in Jesus Christ, its spiritual inheritance. And this century is significant for many reasons, one of which is that it's the century in which God is putting His people back in the right place and in the right condition.

Let me read these words that were spoken by Peter in Acts 3:19 and following. It's addressed to the people of God and I believe it's just as appropriate tonight as it was when Peter spoke it.

> "Repent therefore and be converted..."

Or turn back to God.Repent and turn back to God.

> "...that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus [I'm going to give you a little of my own translation] that He may send Jesus the Messiah who was before appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since time began."

I'd like to take you through four simple stages there which I see to be God's process of making the church and His people ready for the return of the Lord. And because we all here understand English, I'm going to give it to you in four English words, each of which begins with the letters RE. Now, if you're a theologian and you want to look at your Bible for a moment, going back to verse 19 you can very easily find the first word because it's the first word in that verse. Which is it? Repent, that's right. Repentance. It's the first step. Every time God's people get out of line with His will and out of a right relationship with Him there's one

unvarying requirement which is repentance. And people cannot ever get back into a right relationship with God if they try to bypass repentance.

Now, repentance is not emotion, it's a decision. The word that's translated in the New Testament repent in secular Greek is almost invariably translated "to change your mind." So, repentance means I'm going to change my mind. In essence, it means I've been living the way I please, I've been setting my own standards, I've been believing what I want to believe, I've been pursuing my own aims in life. Now I'm going to change my mind. I'm going to turn right around, face God, submit to Him without reservation and say, "God, you tell me what to do and I'll do it." That's repentance. And really, it's one of the most needed emphases in the church today. A lot of people think they can get by without that radical change but it doesn't work. There is no substitute. Some people say do Christians have to repent? Everybody who's got out of a right relationship with God has to repent. In the last book of the New Testament, the book of Revelation, Jesus sent messages to seven churches with whom He was dealing. And five out of the seven churches, the first requirement that He gave was repent. So, if the proportion is anything like it was then today, at least five out of every seven Christians need to repent. I'm inclined to think it's higher than that.

We've lost the vision of what it means to be really submitted to God, yielded to Him. A person who has repented makes no demands, doesn't set any requirements; he simply says, "Here I am, God. I'm yours, tell me what to do." And when you get to that point I can assure you God will tell you what to do. Some of you may be saying I don't know what God's will is, I don't understand God's plan. Let me suggest that you try repenting and I think you'll find before long you'll get a very clear answer from God. But, He won't give an answer to the unrepentant, to the stubborn, to the self-willed.

After repentance there's another word beginning with RE in verse 19. If anybody is a theologian you can find it for me. Refreshing, that's the word. When we repent we begin to experience refreshing. We begin to come alive. Life becomes exciting again. It becomes exciting to go to church, it becomes exciting to attend a prayer meeting, it becomes exciting to live the Christian life. The Christian life, when we live it in the right attitude, is never boring. It's never monotonous. If you're experience is that it's boring and monotonous, you need to be refreshed. And, in order to be refreshed you need to repent.

But, refreshing is not the end purpose of God. I think in recent decades the church has experienced a certain measure of refreshing. You could call it the Charismatic renewal or whatever you like. It certainly hasn't made us perfect but it's changed a lot of us. It hasn't got us to our destination. I believe the purpose of refreshing is to give us new vision and new strength to move on to the ultimate purpose of God.

And then if you go to verse 21 you find the next word beginning with RE, restoration. Refreshing is intended by God to lead to restoration. I think a lot of Charismatics have misunderstood this. They've just enjoyed being baptized in the Holy Spirit and getting gifts of the Spirit and learning to pray to God and they thought that's the end. It isn't. It's just an encouragement from God to help you to move on to the end. But the end is restoration.

And then it says in connection with that that heaven must receive—and I would add retain—Jesus until the times of restoration of all things. So, somewhere in this period of restoration we can expect the fourth word beginning with RE. That's not in the text, you have to supply it. What is it? Return, that's right. Who's coming back? I didn't hear you. That's right.

So the order is repentance, refreshing, restoration and return. I believe we are in a period of restoration. Many things are being restored to the church. The supernatural gifts of the Holy Spirit, the ministry gifts— apostles, prophets and so on. The message is being restored. We have truncated the message for a long while. We just talked about the gospel. The New Testament introduces it as the gospel of the kingdom. It's a message about a king and His name is Jesus. The gospel declares that there's a king who reigns and rules and people had better submit themselves to Him. It's not just a convenient way out of your problems; the gospel is an invitation into the kingdom of God under the kingship of Jesus.

And then I believe perhaps, in a way, the most important thing that God intends to restore is the unity of the church. So when we see it in that context I think what appeared perhaps hopeless or impossible begins to assume some kind of reality for us. In a sense, I think unity is one of the final purposes of God in restoration.

Let's consider what is meant by unity. Does it mean that God wants one big worldwide denomination to which everybody shall belong? My answer is no, thank God, it doesn't. The answer to what is meant by unity is to be found in the prayer that Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:20–23 where the theme is unity.

And He says:

> "Neither do I pray for these alone [that's the disciples who were with Him at that time], but also for those who will believe in me through their word..."

And all of us who are believers have come to believe through the word of the apostles because that's the New Testament.

> "...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."

So Jesus prays specifically for all believers that we all may be one. I challenge you. I don't believe Jesus ever prayed a prayer that the Father will not answer. I think the guarantee of our unity is the fact that Jesus prayed for it. Because, Jesus always got His prayers answered.

Then He goes on to say:

> "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 sent me, and have loved them as you have loved me."

So the pattern of our unity is the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. And that's not a unity based on location because Jesus was on earth, the Father was in heaven when He prayed that prayer. It's not a unity based on organization or denomination because there's no God denomination. God is not a denomination so that's not the kind of unity that Jesus is praying for. The unity between the Father and the Son is a unity of relationship. And it's possible because of another person, the Holy Spirit. So, though the Father and the Son were separated—one on earth and one in heaven—they were still one through the Holy Spirit. Now, without the Holy Spirit unity is not possible. I heard a Catholic theologian actually speaking to Pentecostals and try to explain to them about the Holy Spirit! And he made this statement which was just an illustration. He said, "The Holy Spirit is the love relationship between the Father and the Son." I don't think he intended that as a final theological definition, and I wouldn't accept it. But, it is illuminating. The Holy Spirit is the love relationship between the Father and the Son. The relationship between the Father and the Son is in the Spirit.

So, when the Lord prays that we maybe one as He and the Father are one, He's not praying that we'll be all in one place, that we'll be all one organization or one denomination; but that we will have a relationship among ourselves like the relationship between the Father and the Son which is a relationship in the Holy Spirit. And when you see that I think it makes more clear what God has in mind. It doesn't make it easy but it does make sense. God wants us to relate to one another who are true believers by the Holy Spirit in the same way that the Father and the Son relate to one another.

You see, primarily Christianity is not a religion of right doctrine. And those who build all their religion on doctrine usually end up in problems. As a matter of fact, generally speaking, historically in the history of the church the groups that have laid the most emphasis on doctrine are the ones that have split most often. And if I could be permitted to name two I would name the Brethren and the Baptists. Who can count the number of different groups that have emerged? Why? Because they seek to base their unity on doctrine. Now, doctrine is not unimportant but it's not the basis of unity. And Christianity is not primarily a religion of right doctrine, it's a religion of right relationships. First and foremost, a right relationship between me and God. Second, a right relationship between me and my fellow believers.

You see, the great symbol of the Christian church which we have behind us, I have behind me and you have in front of your eyes, is the cross. The cross consists of two beams—vertical and horizontal. The vertical beam represents the relationship of man to God. The horizontal represents the relationship between man and man. But, the cross is so designed that if the horizontal beam is crooked the vertical beam has to be crooked too. When one is crooked the other is crooked. And that's a very important lesson because if I'm in a wrong relationship with my fellow believers I'm in a wrong relationship with God. It's sometimes easy to deceive ourselves that our relationship with God is right without checking on our relationship with our fellow believers.

So, the unity that Jesus prayed for is a unity of relationship through the Holy Spirit. And although I think it's important what we believe, I'm inclined to think that in this present age with our limited understanding and the many limitations we have intellectually, it's improbable we'll ever all come to believe exactly the same in every detail. And I don't think it matters.

Now, there are certain great, simple, basic truths I believe we have to believe. Perhaps I should mention them. I believe we have to believe in the deity of Jesus. Jesus is God. I heard an Anglican rector say once to his people if you have any problem with that statement, Jesus is God, you better check on your attitude to God.

Secondly, I believe Jesus was born of a virgin. And let me say this reverently, if he wasn't born of a virgin he was illegitimate.

Thirdly, I believe He led a sinless life.

Fourthly, I believe He died an atoning death for the sins of all humanity.

Fifthly, I believe He rose again physically from the dead. And if you have any problems with that you need to check on your attitude to God.

Sixth, I believe He ascended to heaven and He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father.

And seventh, I believe He's coming again in person in power and glory to judge the living and the dead, and to establish His kingdom on earth.

Let me just ask, I don't want to embarrass you. How many of you here tonight can say, "Brother Prince, I believe in all those seven things you just said." Would you raise your hand for a moment? Well, praise God, I'm not looking for people who don't raise their hand but that clearly is almost all if not all the people here.

Now we may, some of us, be Anglicans, some of us Presbyterians, some of us Baptists, some of us house church. I don't think that that's the most important issue. I think the issue is how do we relate to God and how do we relate to our brothers. But if you are, for instance, in the Brethren and you can't relate to an Anglican, I think you have a serious problem. And likewise if you're an Anglican and you can't relate to a Pentecostal, you have a serious problem. Some of us need to check on our relationships.

There was a time in my younger years when I was fairly new in the ministry; I was very determined to get my doctrines exactly right. And I have that analytical kind of mind and am used to defining things. I was trying to check on all the people that were right and the more I majored on my doctrines the fewer people there were that were right. I ended up with about fifteen and a half people and I wasn't sure about the half! But I then learned that's not the way to unity. Nor is it the way to happiness. I was a very frustrated person in many ways.

Now, when Jesus speaks about this kind of unity He says it will achieve two things in relationship to the world. He says that the world may believe that the Father sent the Son and then He says that the world may know that the Father sent the Son, and He loves us as He loves the Son. So if you are interested, as you certainly should be, in reaching the world with the testimony of Jesus, it's good, very good and important, to be committed to evangelism. But I don't believe any of us can evangelize the whole earth on our own. But there is one testimony, if we could achieve it, which would speak to the whole world. What's that testimony? It's our unity. Jesus says if we really have that unity the world will believe and know that the gospel is true. It doesn't mean they'll all be converted but they'll all be confronted with the truth in a way that they cannot really deny.

Now I'd like to give you just a picture of unity that's taken from the book of Psalms, a very short, simple and beautiful psalm. Psalm 133:

> "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!"

Notice the word dwell. It's really not sufficient to come together for a couple of hours on Sunday morning and sit in the same building and even sing the same hymns. Because, dwelling together means a lot more than that. It means in many ways sharing our lives, getting to know one another and relating to one another. Again, the issue is relationship.

And then it goes on to say what unity is like and it gives two beautiful pictures. The first is the anointing oil that was put on the head of the high priest; the second is the dew that descends.

> "It [that's unity] is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down to the edge of his garments."

The high priest was anointed with a very special anointing oil which could not be used on ordinary people. It was placed on his head but it was in such abundance that it ran onto his beard and down on to the collar of his garment. And even his garment was permeated with the fragrance of the anointing. And the psalmist says that's what unity between brethren is. It starts on the head, which is Jesus, but it flows down on the body, which is you and me.

And then he says also:

> "It is like the dew of Hermon..."

Now Hermon is the most beautiful mountain in the Middle East. It's up on the southern part of what we call Syria today. It's on the border, really, between Israel and Syria. It's a snow covered mountain at certain seasons of the year.

> "It's like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion..."

But this beautiful dew from Hermon is pictured as descending on Zion. That is, Jerusalem. And then it says concerning this unity:

> "...for there the Lord commanded the blessing..."

Where? Where brethren dwell together in unity. See, I meet many, many Christians who are seeking God's blessing. I often suggest to them rather than spend so much time seeking the blessing why don't you meet the conditions for the blessing. Then you won't have to seek it. It will come. When brethren dwell together in unity, God has commanded the blessing. There's nothing that can keep the blessing away when God has commanded it. So that's a picture of it.

Now the important thing to see about the oil and the dew is that they're sent from above downwards. And that's like unity. Unity comes from above downwards. And so does disunity. They both begin with leadership and here is one of the great responsibilities of leadership.

About two decades ago I worked with a group of ministers trying to get God's people together. And we found it easy to get the sheep together but difficult to get the shepherds. And what we discovered was getting the sheep together doesn't solve the problem because the moment they go back to their own shepherds the shepherds are disunited so the sheep find themselves in different groups, cut off from one another. So here is a problem of leadership. And all of us who are leaders in the body of Christ, in some way or another we're pastors or evangelists, teachers or what, we all have to accept a measure of responsibility for the disunity of the body of Christ. The responsibility lies at the door of the leadership, not so much at the door of the flock.

Now, what is the root cause of disunity? I want to say it is not theology. Theology can be misused to bring about disunity but the cause is very simply stated by the apostle Paul. It's what he calls the flesh or the carnal nature. Man's unredeemed nature as he is before God touches him and changes him, the nature of a rebel. I'll show you one passage which very clearly proves this. 1 Corinthians 3:1–4. One of the various problems in the church at Corinth was that there was a certain amount of disunity among them. I would say nothing compared with the disunity there is the in the church today. And Paul says this:

> "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ."

You're just spiritual babies, he says.

> "I fed you with milk, and not with solid food..."

And you see, babies cannot receive solid, spiritual food. Even if it's preached, they can't receive it.

> "...until now you were not able to receive it. And even now you are still not able, for you are still carnal [or fleshly]."

Now, what's the evidence? How did Paul know that they were carnal? Some theologians say that the Corinthian church was carnal because they spoke so much in tongues. Most of the people who say that don't speak in tongues themselves. And it's not what Paul says. He's not opposed to speaking in tongues. In fact, he says I would that you all spoke with tongues. What was the evidence they were carnal? They were divided, they were following human leaders rather than following Jesus. And on that basis Paul said there's only one cause, it's your carnality. So this is what he says:

> "For where there are envy, strife and divisions among you, are you not carnal, and behaving like mere men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul,' and another, 'I am of Apollos,' are you not carnal?"

What was the mark of carnality? Envy, strife, division and following human leaders. There's nothing wrong with following human leaders, in a certain sense, if they're the leaders God has given you. But letting human leaders obscure Christ so that the commitment was to Paul or to Apollos rather than to Jesus.

And notice that Paul didn't disapprove of people being committed to Apollos but approve of people being committed to him. He disapproved of all who made human leadership the basis of their Christianity. And I would suggest that's obviously the condition in the church today. And the root cause is not doctrine, it's not theology; it's carnality. It's our fleshly nature.

And then in Galatians 5 Paul lists the works of the flesh. And the same truth is very clearly brought out there. Galatians 5, beginning at verse 19:

> "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatries, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, drunkenness, revelries, and the like."

If you analyze that list you'll find there are four categories of the works of the flesh, the carnal nature. The first is sexual immorality. The second is what we call the occult—idolatry and sorcery. The third which is by much the largest category is every form of division. And the fourth is self indulgence. So those are the fourth categories of the works of the flesh. Let me give them to you again. Immorality, the occult, division and self-indulgence.

But if you look the examples of division they're three times as numerous as the others. Here's the list. Hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies and envy. All those are different aspects of division. So the largest category of works of the flesh is forms of division. And that's precisely what Paul says. If there's division among you you're carnal.

Now that tells us also very simply the remedy. What is the remedy for division in the church? Paul states it in the same chapter in verse 24. He says:

> "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires."

There's only one remedy for the fleshly nature, it's crucifixion. In Romans 6:6 Paul says:

> "Our old man [the old Adamic nature] was crucified with Christ."

That's something God did more than 19 centuries ago. But here he says those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh. We have to do it. God has made it possible, we have to apply it.

Now, crucifixion is not painless. And crucifying your flesh is not painless. You have to take your hands and your feet and drive the nails of crucifixion in and say I am crucified with Christ. You have to deny your fleshly desires and ambitions. I think of this one key word in that list that I read, it's selfish ambition. Personally, I think that is the reason for most division in the body of Christ, it's the ambitions of leaders who want to do their own thing, promote themselves, build a big church, get a big name and, in general, by doing so obscure Jesus. So that's the remedy. Don't let people persuade you we have to change our theology. We may but that's not the remedy. You can have all the right theology and still be a source of division if your carnal nature hasn't been dealt with.

Let me just point out a little of what the New Testament says about love. There are various different words in Greek for love. The kind of love that Jesus speaks about, the Greek word—many of you have heard it—is agape. And it's primarily the love of God. Not exclusively, it's used of human love. Jesus even said sinners love sinners so it's possible for sinners to have certain kinds of love like that. But generally speaking, it's love which originates with God. And in John 13:34–35, Jesus said:

> "A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another."

Notice, love is not a recommendation, it's not a suggestion; it's a commandment. If we do not love one another we are disobedient. That's the plain truth. And Jesus explained the kind of love; He said you must love one another as I have loved you.

And then He makes a very important statement. In essence, He gives the world the right to judge the church. He says if you have love one for another, all will know that you are my disciples. But the opposite is also true. If we do not love one another, the world has got every right to say they are not the disciples of Jesus. So, we cannot refuse the world's judgment. Jesus has given the world the right to judge the church.

And you know, a lot of times we're trying to tell the world how to run its business and the world has got every right to turn around and say when you people can run your own business then come and tell us how to run ours. Because, the divisions in the church are so manifest. I think most of you would agree that one of the main obstacles to presenting the gospel to people is the division in the church. I talked to a Jewish young man once and talked about becoming a believer in the Messiah. He said, "Which group do you want me to join?" And he was in Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem actually—this is a sad statement—but the Christians actually fight one another physically. Where? At the tomb of the holy sepulcher. Two different groups which I will not specify lay claim to a certain part of what's supposed to be a holy place and it takes Israeli soldiers to separate them. That's an extreme example but you can understand why Israelis say I just don't know how to believe in that.

All of us have a measure of responsibility for keeping people away from faith in Jesus by our divisions.

And then in John 15:12–13, Jesus said:

> "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

And then He specifies precisely the kind of love.

> "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

So the kind of love that Jesus is talking about is a love that lays down its life for other people. And John picks this up in his first epistle. 1 John 3:16–17. And he says:

> "By this we know love, because He [God] laid down His life for us."

We wouldn't know really what love is if we didn't have the example of God. We have no full human pattern. But now we know what love really is because God, through Jesus, laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren, for our fellow believers.

And then just in case we should be too spiritual he gives a very practical application. In the next verse he says:

"But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

In other words, if we have that which will supply the need of our brothers or sisters and we see them in need and do not supply their need, it's useless to say that we have the love of God dwelling in us. Is that right? Is that logical? I want to get your assent to that. The reason is because I'm going to apply it.

It's very much related to what we said before we began this session. If your brothers in mainland China have a need and you have the ability to supply that need, how can you claim that the love of God is in you if you do nothing about it? Is that right? Am I speaking the truth? I don't want to convince you against your will. But to me it's so clear. I'm not pointing a finger at others because I have a continual struggle in my own life with selfishness. Most of us are born selfish. And it takes the dealings of God and the power of the Spirit of God to deal with selfishness. So let's be willing to let God deal with it.

Then I've got to give you one other Scripture about love. This is one of my favorites. It's 1 Timothy 1:5–6. And I want to give it to you in the New American Standard translation which I don't have in front of me but I know what it says. This translation says:

> "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, from sincere faith."

But the New American Standard says:

> "The goal of our instruction is love..."

I like that because it's so plain. If we do not produce love in the people of God we miss the whole purpose of the ministry. The goal of our instruction is love. When I first read that translation I thought to myself, Brother Prince, you better check on your ministry. Look at the people you minister to, consider the results in them and ask yourself are you producing loving people. If not, all your ministry and all your words are a waste of time. Listen:

> "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, from a sincere faith..."

Those are the three conditions for maintaining love.

> "...a pure heart, a good conscience, from a sincere faith; from which some, having

> strayed, have turned aside to idle talk."

So anything in the church that does not produce love is idle talk. Let's look at the congregations and ask ourselves how much idle talk goes on in church. How much teaching, preaching and religious activity that doesn't produce the one goal which is the goal of our instruction. I'm not talking to others, I'm continually checking my own life and my own ministry. Am I helping people to be loving? If not, it's all a waste of time. And when I stand before the Lord on the day of judgment it will all be burned up in an instant.

Let me try to give you a few, quick, simple answers to the question how can unity be restored? How can we come back to unity? And I'm going to speak about three different sources of action. First of all, the church. Secondly, God. And the third may surprise you, Satan. But actually, Satan is often used to help to bring about the purposes of God and he's going to be used in this connection. You know, of course, that it was Satan that brought about the crucifixion of Jesus. He didn't know what he was doing but he was the instrument that provided salvation for the world. And one of the things that really blesses me is to see how God uses His enemies.

I always think of the story of Moses. Let's look at that for a moment. Here's Moses, born a beautiful child, put out to die. Pharaoh's daughter comes and takes him in, raises him up, gives him the best education. And God speaks to Pharaoh but Pharaoh didn't hear him say it. God says, "Pharaoh, I have a leader that's going to be the source of the defeat and the downfall of your people. He's going to break your power; he's going to administer a defeat that you'll never recover from. And I just want you to train him for me for 40 years." That's how God operates.

Let's look at the three sources of action. First of all, the church, God's people. We already looked at the appropriate Scripture, Acts 3:19, repent. What do we have to do? We have to repent. Repent of what? Everything in our lives that is a source of disunity. Every attitude that tolerates disunity and is quite content to go on in disunity. We have to repent of that.

And then God has His part to play and without God's part it won't come about. Our human actions and reactions will not do the job by themselves. But in Acts 2 on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter stood up and applied the prophecy of Joel. We read in Acts 2:16–18 what Peter said. He said:

> "This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel..."

And then he quotes from Joel.

> "It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, [right at the end of the age] that I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my maidservants I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy."

Now that's a divine intervention. That is something in the sovereignty of God. He says before the age closes I will visit the whole earth and all humanity with an outpouring of the supernatural power and gifts of my Holy Spirit. And when it says all flesh it means the whole human race.

Now, we have seen a measure of that fulfilled in the last two decades but there are many, many sections of humanity that have never even yet had a drop. The people of Mongolia, Outer Mongolia, have virtually not experienced one drop of the Holy Spirit. Many of the nations of North Africa and the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and other nations in that area, they've not experienced one drop of the Spirit. So the prophecy is not yet fulfilled. But it's God's contribution to unity because I pointed out to you that unity of the kind that Jesus prayed for is possible only in the Holy Spirit. The more we have of the Holy Spirit in the church the easier it will be to come back to unity.

Let me point out what Jesus prayed in that prayer we looked at in John 17. Jesus said in verse 20 to the Father:

> "The glory which you gave me I have given them [my disciples], that they may be one, just as we are."

Now, that doesn't come out very clearly in the English but I talked this over with a Greek scholar who is a modern Greek, born Greek speaking, and he pointed out—which I agree with—that when it says Jesus says "that" it's "in order that." The glory you have given me I have given them, in order that they may be one. It takes the glory to make us one. The glory is the outpoured power and presence of God in the Holy Spirit.

So, all our efforts and all our prayers by themselves would not achieve enough but God is moving and intervening by His Spirit. And it's the outpoured Spirit which is the great motivator, the great helper to unity. I think you'll agree if you've been part of the Charismatic movement for any length of time we're far from perfect but the moving of the Holy Spirit has broken down a lot of barriers. There are probably people here this evening from, I suppose at least ten congregations, at least. That's my guess, I don't know. It's very improbable that 10 years ago people of those congregations would have come together. See? So in spite of all our problems, our imperfections, God is moving by His Spirit and He's giving back the glory that the church had when it started in order that we all may be one.

And let me hasten to add it's far from perfect.

And then finally there's Satan's activities. I've already pointed out that God uses Satan. And Satan is going to play an important part in uniting the true church in two different ways. First of all, by pressure from without. Matthew 24:9–13, Jesus describes things at the close of this age.

> "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake..."

Who is you there? Very simple. You is us, isn't it? All right.

> "...and then many will be offended, and will betray one another, and will hate one another..."

Many who? Christians, that's right.

> "...then many false prophets will rise up, and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."

The Greek word there for love is agape, it's primarily Christians. So, there's going to be such intense evil pressures against us at the end of this time that they're either going to drive us from the Lord or drive us to the Lord. Those that do not apostate, that do not turn away, that do not deny their faith, will be forced together.

You see, if you're going to be imprisoned for being a Christian it really isn't too important if you're in prison for being a Baptist or an Anglican. It won't seem so important in those situations. This has already begun to happen in many parts of the earth, as we're aware.

So that's the pressure from outside.

Then there's the pressure from inside which I must deal with very quickly. 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul says that the return of Christ, the day of the Lord will not take place until first the apostasy takes place. I won't quote the passage because time is running out. But he says first there will be "the" apostasy. Most translations say falling away but the Greek word is apostasia from which we get the English word apostasy. The only other place in which it's used in the New Testament speaks of Paul being accused of turning people away from the law of Moses. So it is essentially a rejection of revealed religious truth. There is coming an apostasy in the church, "the" apostasy.

Now, I personally believe we're living in that. I'm aware that all through the centuries sometime church leaders have been immoral and covetous and very carnal. But basically, they have not denied the great basic truths of the Christian faith. In fact, they've exploited them. But this century and more and more as time goes on, the great, simple, basic truths of the Christian faith have been officially denied by multitudes of believing clergymen. It's said that two thirds of the Anglican bishops in Britain do not believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. That's apostasy. I'm not saying it to attack the Anglican Church because many other churches are in a similar condition. But this is the apostasy.

And Paul goes on to point out that it will produce two things. The antichrist, because the barrier to the antichrist is the church. When the barrier has broken down in the church it will open the way for the antichrist.

The other thing that it will produce is the false church. And you see, if you want to look in your own time in Revelation 17, you'll see that there are only going to be two groups in Christendom at the end of the age. One is the bride, the other is the harlot. And my personal conviction is every professing Christian will find him or herself in one or other of those two groups. If you're not in the bride you'll be in the harlot. There won't be, I don't think, any major denominational distinctions.

What's the difference between the bride and the harlot? Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, "I've espoused you to Christ as a chaste virgin." The church is already espoused to Jesus but the marriage ceremony has not yet taken place. The bride is the one who maintains a loyal commitment to Jesus, the harlot is the one who denies Jesus. And if you look at the apostasy in the church today you'll find essentially it's a denial of Jesus. So we're going to be faced with this issue, to be part of the bride or part of the harlot.

In the book of Joel, at the end of the age Joel sees a vision of multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. The valley of decision is a valley which once you get into you can't get out of it until you've made a decision. The decision will be loyal to Jesus or disloyal.

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