

Balancing the Scales of Unity—Part 1 ©

By Steven Lambert, ThD

I believe in unity among believers—wholeheartedly. I believe it is vital to the Body of Christ in order to accomplish the purposes and plans of God on Earth. More importantly, beyond believing in it, I want it. No, I covet it! That is, I have a strong desire for it. I much prefer unity over disunity, harmony over disharmony, accord over discord, concord over controversy, agreement over disagreement, amity over animus.

We know God likes unity too. God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit spoke about it in Scripture:

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in **unity**! (Ps. 133:1)*

*I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in **unity**, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and didst love them, even as Thou didst love Me. (Jn. 17:23)*

*being diligent to preserve the **unity** of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:3)*

*until we all attain to the **unity** of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. (Eph. 4:13)*

*And beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of **unity**. (Col. 3:14)*

I believe in and strongly desire unity, but I believe in Biblical unity. There are more versions of unity than just the Biblical one, however, that are not based in the principles of God's Word, Will, and Ways, but in a far different philosophy and agenda. For example there is the Muslim version of unity in which everyone in the world believes in Allah and practices the Koran, and the entire population of the world is divided into two classes—believers and infidels. There is the Catholic Church's concept of unity, in which all the religions of the world are coalesced into a single "unified" universal church. Then, there is the humanistic, Age of Aquarius, concept of utopian unity poetically and melodiously articulated by the hedonistic pied piper of the 1960s, John Lennon, in his idyllic ode to Godless one-world collectivism, *Imagine*. And, that's just to name a few!

Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals have been taught yet another adulterated version of unity that has actually become chains of bondage to them. The centerpiece of that version is the hypothesis of "covenant relationships."

In a nutshell, the premise of "covenant relationships" is that since all believers have come into a covenant-based relationship with God through Christ and His shed blood, and consequently have been "adopted" into the Divine Family (all of which, of course, is most true), then therefore, by virtue of that union, all believers have also automatically entered into a permanent, binding covenant with every other professing "believer" who has likewise become a partaker of the same transactions. Hence the term "covenant relationships."

This concept of "covenant relationships" with which most Charismatics are familiar had its origins during the Latter Rain Movement that began in 1948, introduced in the writings of a small number of proponents of the teachings associated with the movement. It is important in scrutinizing this concept for the purpose of assaying its validity to keep in mind that it was an important patch in the fabric of "the manifested sons of God" doctrine—a primary component of Latter Rain theology—which the vast majority of theologians consider heretical. Nevertheless, Latter Rain adherents continued to successfully promulgate their version of "covenant relationships" during the Pentecostal Movement during the 1950s, as well as the Charismatic Movement with all of its submovements that began in 1960 and ebbed in the mid-1980s. It was during one of those submovements—the Shepherding Movement of the 1970s—that the fallacious concept of "covenant relationships" became widely accepted and thereby was woven into the very fabric, foundations, and functions of the Neo-Pentecostal Church.

“Koinonia”—Comm-Unity

The primary emphasis of the “covenant relationships” teaching is the interdependence and “*koinonia*” (i.e., commonality) among believers that it predicates on the fact that we are now “blood-brothers/sisters” by virtue of our having been adopted into the Family of God. Typically, purported scriptural support for the Latter Rain version of interrelations among believers relies heavily upon Luke’s account in the Book of Acts concerning what took place in the Early Church in the days immediately following the original Pentecostal outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. And everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common [Greek, “koina”; hence, “koinonia”]; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

This passage is indeed a key source of information about the supernatural atmosphere in the Early Church following Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, appearance, and ascension that transpired as a result of apostolic anointing and impartation. It truly was an ecstatic time! As the Body of Christ, individually and collectively, were being transformed into a collective Holy Habitation of the Spirit of God, and were gradually becoming more and more cognizant of who they were through the apostle’s teaching, their commitment and dedication to one another increased commensurately. There was a commonality, *koinonia*, that developed among them, in which they were bearing one another’s burdens in both prayer and practice, and living a life-style that was a daily practice of vivid connection with the Spirit of God and one another.

In trying to understand this commonality, it is vital to understand that it developed as a direct result of their devotion “*to the apostle’s teaching,*” preeminently. The apostolic dimension, when a group of people truly receive and devote themselves to it, will produce a supernatural atmosphere—an *anointed ambience*—in which the supernatural is commonplace. And when I say, supernatural, I am not referring only to the signs and wonders of healing, deliverance, and the miraculous, that were taking place through the apostles, but also to the signs and wonders—the supernatural—that was taking place in the interrelations and interactions of these people. It is not “natural,” that is, normal human nature, for a group of people to be collectively and individually “*devoted*” to much of anything. It is not natural for a group of people to “*day by day,*” consistently and persistently, “*continue*” in anything, much less something good and noble. Moreover, it is certainly not natural for a group of people to day by day continue in something “*with one mind,*” and especially not in the Temple (church). But then to continue with one mind not only in the Temple but also as they broke bread together in Christian Communion in one another’s homes, even doing it with “*gladness and sincerity of heart,*” confirmed beyond doubt that what they were living in was truly a supernatural atmosphere! No wonder they were “*having favor with all the people!*”

This was genuine commonality, *koinonia*, or interdependence at its finest! This was living out in daily life Jesus’ Commandment, which He said summed up all the law and the prophets—Love God and love one another. This was the essence and summation of the “Christian Life.” For this brief moment in time described in Luke’s account, the Early Church was a living paragon of Truth. They were “true worshipers,” because they were worshipping God both in spirit and in truth, simultaneously. There was no separation between the spiritual truths they espoused and the application of those truths in their daily lives. This snapshot of the Early Church when *koinonia* was its centerpiece, is the model the End-times Church should be attempting to emulate and regain.

So, lest I be misunderstood, let me hasten to say I wholeheartedly believe the principle of interdependence and commonality among believers is a valid principle, that is, within its Biblical bounds and framework. It is an incontrovertible fact that all genuinely Born Again believers have been adopted into the Family of God, and as a result have become spiritual brothers and sisters in the Lord. So also, the New Testament especially is replete with passages reminding us of our especial responsibility toward “*the Brethren.*” Thus, in no way am I demeaning or diminishing the validity of the special familial-type relationship in which the Brethren all share, or the special responsibility incumbent upon each of us regarding our brothers and sisters in the Lord. A study of the “one anothers” in the books of the New Testament will bring to light the privilege and responsibility really entailed in Jesus’ command to “*love one another.*” Moreover, I would wholly concur that this privileged responsibility inherent with our special fraternal relationship has very real and pragmatic application in the natural realm and by no means is to be construed merely as spiritual rhetoric.

The Perverting Effect of Latter Rain Mysticism

Nevertheless, while the precept of interdependence and commonality among believers is certainly a valid one, as is the case with a number of other facets of Truth, the version of “covenant relationships” that so many Charismatics have been indoctrinated with is a distortion and perversion that “*exceed(s) that which is written,*” going beyond the God-intended meaning and application as delineated in Scripture. A common denominator of all heretical teaching is the “super-spiritualization” of perfectly valid principles presented in the Word of God that are intended to have a fairly natural, pragmatic application, and on the other hand, “naturalization,” or codifying in the natural realm, of matters which essentially are spiritual metaphors and not intended to have literal or natural application. The term that describes such super-spiritualization is: *mysticism*. Unfortunately mysticism was quite prevalent in the doctrines of the Latter Rain Movement and, due to the continued strong influence of Latter Rain teaching upon the Neo-Pentecostal church, mysticism and mystical doctrines remain quite prevalent in the theology and culture of the Pentecostal/Neo-Pentecostal church today.

The version of “covenant relationships” that has now permeated much of the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal church is a product of this spiritually toxic rue of Truth mixed with mysticism. Under the auspices of the fallacious and errant teachings, the application of this Scripturally-valid principle of interdependency and fraternal responsibility among believers is extended far beyond its proper import and true intent, and conveniently transformed into very unscriptural chains of spiritual bondage and captivity. While believers are to value and validate fraternal relationships, as well as demonstrate a certain measure of unflinching and “unconditional” commitment to one another, those relationships in terms of their application in the natural realm in the here and now are not sacrosanct or inviolable, and they most definitely do have limits. Understanding and acknowledging those limits and limitations is imperative to avoiding excess and error.

No one in his right mind would be so foolish as to hold that this interdependence or *koinonia* amongst the Brotherhood does not have limits and limitations. If you do, dear friend, I have some bills I would be happy to send you to pay, since absolute interdependence and liberal interpretation of *koinonia* would mean **my** bills are **your** bills. Oh, and there is a new car I am going to order and send you the bill to pay too.

Likewise, thank God that the concept of interdependence among believers to achieve “unity” does not infer an obligation to live under one roof, commune-style, with everyone else who claims to be a Christian. If it did, I’d go looney in a hurry, because I don’t know if you’ve ever noticed, but as my former pastor used to say, “God has some strange kids!” I’m sorry, no one will ever convince me that communal living as a paradigm for believers today is the import of the Acts account of the Early Church as some people contend. As far as I’m concerned there’s no roof big enough for more than one family unit. Sometimes there’s no roof big enough for **one** family! Thank God, while calling us to a certain kind and degree of spiritual *interdependence*, at the same time, He has mandated a certain kind and degree of *independence* as well. Just because we are all part of the “Family of God”—we don’t all have to live together under one roof, nor in some sort of a Christian kibbutz.

It's no different than how God has designed it in the natural. We're all members of the human race, but we are not **married** to everyone, but only to one spouse, and we have our own family with whom we are intimate and to whom we are wholly committed. Moreover, we have our own home we "go home" to each night—otherwise, it would be perfectly okay for a complete stranger to come sashaying into your house in the evening saying, "Hi, folks, I'm home! What's for supper?" We all have blood-relatives, but thank God we don't have to all live together under one roof as one family unit. If we did the insane-asylums and prisons would be far more populated.

True Unity is not All-Inclusive

It's just not humanly possible to be committed to everyone in the same way and degree as we are to our own immediate families or our spouse, nor is that what God intended. Contrary to the idiotic, New Age, one-world, humanistic philosophies, the human race is not "just one big cosmic-family." Yet, many professing believers have not disabused their minds from the plethora of these kinds of "vain philosophies" and replaced them with the Truth of the Word of God. The result is that the belief system of these professing Christians is an eclectic mixture of false doctrines rooted in false philosophies and false religions from Astrology to Zen and everything in between. Certainly no less can be expected when masses of professing Christians are practitioners of scads of demon-associated practices from martial arts to Freemasonry to occult rituals to yoga and a slew of other abominable religious rituals, and overtly ensconced in romantic relationships with practicing and therefore demon-possessed Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shintoists, and so on.

God simply does not intend for us to be in "unity" with everyone! Unity is a oneness in mind and purpose. It is an agreement of sorts. Amos 3:3 says that two cannot walk together except by agreement. Believers cannot be in unity or agreement with and walk with certain people. That's just the way it is—deal with it! As much as you may want to bring the world's humanistic unity along with the rest of its vain philosophies with you into the Kingdom when you enter it, that cannot fly. And, at that stage of your immaturity, if you do not yet understand that and all the whys and wherefores of it, then you've just got to accept it by faith as being the wisdom of the wiser than you! Sorry, you've got to check all the world's philosophies at the door when you enter the Kingdom of God! I know it makes you feel diminished and vulnerable as you start off-loading all that "wisdom" and "knowledge" that you accumulated from the world's university of "higher learning," but that's the way its SUPPOSED to make you feel—humbled is the word—so that you will cast the whole of the weight of reliance upon God Himself and none other. All of that is nothing more than hot air and bluster that just makes you *feel* smarter, wiser, and more grandiose than you really are anyway. It's all a lie, and you've bought into it all hook, line, and sinker. So, how smart are you really, big shot? All along the devil's been lying to you and making you think more highly of yourself than you ought, which results in separation from God, so that he can ultimately destroy you. Pride cometh before a fall, and a fall before destruction. So, why don't you make it easy on yourself and humble yourself before you are humiliated and come on down here with the rest of us Lilliputians who have realized we're a big fat ZERO in ourselves apart from God?!

Believers are not called to be in unity and agreement with everyone! We can't be! Our quest is fellowship, union, and communion with God preeminently—to walk with God. By definition, to walk with God, we must be in agreement with God. To be in agreement with God intrinsically means that we are going to be in disagreement, disunity, disfellowship with fellow humans who are not walking with God. It's just that simple. The Spirit puts it this way:

*Do not be bound together with **unbelievers**; for what **partnership** have righteousness and lawlessness, or what **fellowship** has light with darkness? Or what **harmony** has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what **agreement** has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. **"Therefore, come***

out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. “And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. (2 Cor. 6:14-18, NAS)

This is one of the many promises of God in Scripture that is a promise of contingency. It’s a covenant, an agreement, a contract—with God. It is a promise, for sure, but it has conditions that are just as sure, and those conditions must be met if the promise is to be fulfilled. The benefits of the promise are great—to the person who meets the conditions. To that person, God promises to dwell with them, walk with them, be their God and be their Father. But, if the conditions are not met, one cannot expect the benefits of the promise to inure to them.

Imbalanced “Unity” is an Abomination to God

Close study of the relatively (and surprisingly) small number of unity Scripture passages makes it clear there is a distinct difference between the “*unity of the Spirit*” God speaks about in His Word and the notion of “unity” centered around “covenant relationships” and promulgated by Latter Rain-influenced teachers. Subtle twisting of the Spirit-intended and -inspired import of God’s Word and an imbalance in the application of the precept of unity has resulted in a distorted and debauched version of unity. Virtually invariably, over-emphasis, or over-balance, is what makes erroneous teaching erroneous, rather than the radical deviation from truth people commonly look for in their vigilance to spot error and avert deception.

Over-emphasis is over-balance, over-balance is imbalance, and imbalance is error, and—“*A false balance [imbalance] is an abomination to God*” (Pro. 11:1). Truth consists of counterbalancing components. Imbalance is averted by counterbalancing each component of Truth with the rest of “*the whole counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27, RSV). Theological Truth is analogous to human cells in that each cell contains the protoplasm that comprises the whole body. In other words, each component of Theological Truth gleaned from the Word of God contains the essence of the whole Word of God, and will be completely compatible and congruous with same. The unfortunate dynamic of imbalance or over-balance is that once it occurs, everything, even that which is good and right, slides toward the imbalance or error and becomes tainted by it. So that, once a person or a group loses spiritual equilibrium, a downward spiral into apostasy is begun. Only the sudden applying of a counter-balancing weight equal to the imbalancing weight can halt the descent, rectify the imbalance, and regain the equilibrium. Many believers and whole groups of believers, unfortunately have slid into an imbalance with respect to “unity” that is an abomination to God. Thus, an equal weight to the over-balance must be applied to the opposite side to regain the balance and rectify the abomination. God often uses prophets to bring a counterbalancing word which when given brings an offense to the mind of believers caught up in the deception. God often offends the mind to win the heart.

So, if you’re offended by this word, dear saint, don’t waste your time writing hateful emails or letters that I will only trash anyway. Just deal with it! If this word rubs the cat the wrong way, the cat needs to turn around—’cause the messenger ain’t gonna, I guarantee you! Frankly, I don’t mind telling you, I’m pretty fed up with humanism-filled people demanding that because I am a Christian and especially because I am a minister, I have to be in agreement and fellowship with everybody on the planet, whether they’re walking with God or walking with the devil! Sorry, folks, ain’t gonna happen! Save your breath! All the humanism-filled milquetoast “Christians” can also save your breath on trying to censor and censure me, claiming I am expressing anger. It ain’t anger, dear heart—it’s **righteous indignation!**—something which the Body of Christ has far too little of, because we’re too cozy with the world. Deal with it, get used to it, because I promise you, there’s more to come from God’s ordained prophets!

True Unity is of the *Holy Spirit*, not the *Human Spirit*

Unity among believers is vital, but it is secondary to and actually a bi-product of unity with God. A significant corroboration of that truth, though I will not elaborate on it here, is represented in the typology of

Moses' Tabernacle, in that the Table of Showbread, typifying the Communion Table, one aspect of which is fellowship among fellow believers (cf., 1 Cor. 10:16,17), was located not in The Most Holy Place of God's presence, or Holy of Holies, but its anteroom, The Holy Place. The former signified fellowship with God and the latter represented fellowship with one another.

True unity is a union or "oneness" with God first and then with our fellows second. True unity is a unity in which our *love* for and *loyalty* to God is first or preeminent, and all other relationships are secondary or subordinate. In fact, genuine unity does indeed result in unity with fellow believers, albeit is rooted in and an outflow of union and communion with God first. The nature of true unity is that apart from God it does not and cannot exist. True unity is a Divine Attribute. God alone is the source of genuine unity. Contrary to what some people apparently believe, unity does not come about merely because you desire to have or produce unity. Rather, it transpires when you become, as the Early Church did however briefly, "*worshippers in spirit and truth.*" In other words, unity is an outflow of true worship—"true worship" being defined as "*worship in spirit and truth.*"

Unity is a God-thing! True unity is the unity that originates with the Godhead, the Trinity. The three Persons of the Godhead continually live in complete unity—oneness of mind and purpose. There most definitely is a "oneness" with the Godhead, but not the kind that unitarianists or modalists want us to believe. It is this perfect oneness or unity that flows from the Godhead that is genuine, bona fide unity. That's the Real McCoy! All other forms of unity are merely human and are counterfeits! Without God, and without His Spirit flowing through you to shape and formulate your life, you will never experience or appropriate the real thing! Genuine unity cannot be manufactured, but it can be generated through supernatural communion (union via fellowship) with the Spirit of God both directly and in the human spirits He inhabits.

Distinguishing True Unity of the Spirit From Contrived Counterfeits

Applied to human interrelations in general and the Body of Christ in particular, true unity of the Spirit flows out of a mutuality, a oneness in purpose and intent, between the Head (Christ) and the Body (believers). True unity of the Spirit is predicated on and operates by means of interdependency in which both the Head and the Body have equal importance and functionality. True unity of the Spirit is a fulfillment of Philippians 2:1-4, in which both the Head and the Body are of the same mind, maintaining mutual love, united in the Spirit, intent on the same solitary purpose (God's), doing nothing from selfish contentiousness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind each regards the other as more important than itself, not merely looking out for its own personal interests, but is more concerned about the interests of others.

Being "*united with Him*" (Rom. 6:5) is the basis for true unity among **humans**. It is the peace of God that is "*the perfect bond*" between brethren and the perfect unity preservative. It is the unity "*of the SPIRIT*" that we are exhorted to preserve (Eph. 4:3)—the unity which is of and emanates from the Spirit, or Life, or Nature, of God, not humanistic unity. True unity is not a product of the **human** spirit, but the **Holy** Spirit. True unity cannot be manufactured by **human** endeavor, but only by the workings of the **Holy** Spirit. True unity of the Spirit is the by-product of being unified with Christ by virtue of the New Birth and walking in union and unity with the indwelling Spirit of God. True unity is not the product of "a meeting of the minds" or a contrived unanimity of men, but the natural by-product and outflow of agreement with the mind of Christ and conformity with the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). The groundwork for unity is not "*reaching* an understanding," but *renewing* our minds with an understanding of the Word of God and *standing under* its veracious authority.

True unity is manifest not by men seeking "common ground," but the "higher ground" of the Spirit realm. True unity is not based on compromise and reconciliation of differences, but rather conviction and reconciliation of humans' sin. True unity is not the result of people *talking* things out, but *walking*, walking in the Spirit, for when we walk in the Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-discipline"—we avoid carrying out the deeds of the flesh, which are acts of

selfishness and self-centeredness that separate fellows. Instead, when we walk in the Spirit, we automatically abide in unity with others who also are so abiding. True unity automatically abides among people truly abiding in Christ. In short, true unity is not man-centered, but truly is Christ-centered!

Indeed, Christ Himself is the very essence of true unity. Any so-called unity and peace not established upon the foundation-rock of Christ is a Godless, humanistic, and totally counterfeit unity. Actions taken by humans in the natural, fleshly realm aimed at producing “unity” among men merely for purposes of self-interest, selfish-gain, selfish ambition, and self-aggrandizement, can never produce real “unity.” Rather, the most they can ever produce is a bogus, synthetic, worthless *truce*, the dictionary definition of which is “a respite from a disagreeable state of affairs,” rather than true unity. A “respite” is a short interval of rest or relief from adverse circumstances. Another definition of a truce is that it is an “armistice”—a temporary cessation of fighting by mutual consent. In the realm of warfare, an armistice or truce is usually an agreement entered into by two parties in which one, the vanquished party, is capitulating (surrendering, yielding) to the vanquishing party, the victor. One, through overwhelming force, has overpowered the other, and as an act of self-preservation the vanquished capitulates or yields to the vanquishing party.

The Bad Fruit of False Unity

Sadly, that is precisely how the precept of “covenant relationships” is used in much of the church realm, with the only difference being that the agreement is usually a “covenant” between the leadership (the victor) of the church or ministry and its members (the vanquished). Sometimes that religious hegemony is overt and obvious, but more often now these days it is subtle and disguised. Nevertheless, regardless of which form it comes in, the result is always psychological imprisonment and spiritual impairment. The victim will feel mentally incarcerated and spiritually diminished. Their poverty is revealed in the trials, troubles, tribulations, and tensions of life. As the storms of life or just the struggles of daily living arise, they find themselves bankrupt of the mental, emotional, and spiritual wherewithal they need to stand and withstand the torrents of trouble. Why? Because they’ve unknowingly disconnected from the Sovereign Source of Supply by connecting or “covenanting” instead with a self-absorbed, self-aggrandizing, self-deceived leadership that represents itself as being its followers’ source. So, when they need God, they literally can’t find Him!—because they’ve been indoctrinated to look somewhere else to someone else.

Do you think it may have been to this sort of subtle idolatry that Jesus was referring when He admonished us to call no one our “leader?”

In Part Two we examine the excessive side of “covenant relationships” further, and discuss its adverse effects in the lives of believers.

This article is an adaption from the book, *Charismatic Captivation*, which may be ordered online at: <http://www.slm.org/pubs/ccbook.html>, or from booksellers worldwide.

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