

Balancing the Scales of Unity—Part 2 ©

By Steven Lambert, ThD

If you did not read Part One of this three-part article, I strongly urge you to do so, because there the foundation was laid for this portion. Moreover, this portion cannot be properly understood or assessed apart from the backdrop laid out in the first Part.

In Part One, I said I believe in and covet unity among believers—wholeheartedly. I talked about my surpassing personal preference for unity over disunity, harmony over disharmony, accord over discord, concord over controversy, agreement over disagreement, amity over animus. I quoted Scripture passages indicating God’s affinity for unity among the Brethren as well. Moreover, I stated that I believe it is vital to the Body of Christ in order to accomplish the purposes and plans of God on Earth.

But, then I indicated that the unity I believe in and strongly desire is *Biblical* unity, juxtaposed to the many other ideas of unity that exist today in the world. Then, I narrowed our focus to the particular notion of unity that many Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals have been taught, the centerpiece of which is the premise of “covenant relationships.” Here again I will say emphatically that I believe in the concept of “covenant relationships”—**within its Biblical bounds**. I believe it is vital that relationships among believers be predicated on the covenant that we share with God, and that it is vital that our interrelations be rooted in the *koinonia* that the Early Church experienced for a time. But, again, the pivotal qualifier with respect to unity is the word—*Biblical*. Indeed, the point of this article and the book chapter from which it is adapted is that, unfortunately, the notion of unity that many in the Church today have been indoctrinated with is not true unity at all, but rather a convoluted counterfeit that is used by some either unscrupulous or unaware leaders as a subtle mechanism of manipulation aimed at predomination for self-aggrandizing purposes.

As I stated in Part One, the version of “covenant relationships” that has now permeated much of the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal church is a product of a spiritually toxic ruse of Truth mixed with mysticism. Under the auspices of the fallacious and errant teachings of the Shepherding Movement of the 1970s that were woven into the very fabric, foundation, and functions of the Neo-Pentecostal Church at large, the application of the Scripturally-valid principle of interdependency and fraternal responsibility among believers, i.e., *koinonia*, is extended far beyond its import and true intent, and is conveniently transformed into very unscriptural chains of spiritual bondage and psychological captivity. While believers are to value and validate fraternal relationships, as well as demonstrate a certain measure of unceasing 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 is imperative to avoid excess and error. In this Part of the article, we will examine the salient characteristics of Biblical unity juxtaposed to those of this fallacious unity to which I allude.

Good and Pleasant Unity

Firstly, let’s look briefly at the nature of *Biblical* unity. One dictionary offers the following definition and synonyms of the word “unity,” which supply us with some excellent concepts concerning the unity that God desires the Body of Christ to flow in:

1. The state or quality of being one; singleness.
2. The state or quality of being in accord; harmony.
3. a. The combination or arrangement of parts into a whole; unification.
b. A combination or union thus formed.
4. Singleness or constancy of purpose or action; continuity.

Synonyms: *unity, union, solidarity.* These nouns denote the condition of accord resulting from an identity or coincidence of interests, purposes, or sympathies among the members of a group. *Unity* implies agreement and collaboration among interdependent, usually varied components. . . . *Union* connotes harmony, cohesiveness, and often unanimity among individuals united in a whole. . . . *Solidarity* refers to the community of objectives and responsibilities that enables a group of people to think and act as one.¹

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

Separating the holy from the profane, we can see from the very first of the unity passages I cited in the first Part, above, that the unity being described by the Spirit, in that it speaks about “*brothers,*” is a unity that is mutual among all the brotherhood, not just certain ones. Indeed, the pivotal word in this passage is “*brothers.*” To understand properly the unity that God has designed for us to walk in, it is imperative to understand that all believers—laymen and leaders alike—are coequal brothers and part of the Brotherhood of Christ. In this Biblical unity there is an inherent mutuality, void of exclusivism and elitism—that “big me, little you” attitude—so overtly manifest and prevalent in so many churches, church groups, networks, and denominations today, leadership in particular. Nothing is more divisive and stifling of comm-unity and camaraderie than such attitudes of arrogance and ascendancy.

One revelation concerning which much of the Body of Christ needs a fresh and added awareness is that regardless of our God-assigned function and responsibilities, status, or station in life, **all** believers—leaders and laymen like—are on par as brothers. Jesus explicitly stated that in Matthew 23:8: “*all of you are on the same level, as BROTHERS*” (L.B.). Spiritually, i.e., in our spirit-being, all believers, male and female, leader and layman, are coequal brothers. Though there is diversity in function, there is yet coequality or parity in our spiritual status or standing in Christ. In a word, we are “peers” or “fellows.” Understanding that we are fellows is the fundamental ingredient in experiencing blessed “fellowship.” Indeed, the overriding point this passage expresses is that unless believers relate and interact with one another as coequal “brothers,” there will be no true unity, and their relationships and interactivity, rather than being *good and pleasant* will be bad and unpleasant—yea *miserable!*

Having become spiritual sons of God through the New Birth, believers are even (cherish the unfathomable thought!) on the same level with Jesus in terms of our heritage and inheritance. Jesus is even our Elder Brother! “*the FIRST-BORN of many BRETHREN*” (Rom. 8:29), because “*both He who sanctifies (Jesus) and those who are sanctified (believers) are all from one Father; He is not ashamed to call them BRETHREN, saying, ‘I will proclaim Thy name to My BRETHREN’*” (Heb. 2:11,12).

Merely by virtue of the New Birth, **every** believer is baptized into the family of God, the Brotherhood of Christ (also known as the *Church*). Moreover, God has Himself elevated the entire entity of the Brotherhood of Christ to as sublime a height as possible short of infringement on the God-Head itself! Truly, if we ever fathomed the profound depths of this glorious Truth, all perceived need for preeminence and predominance over fellows among the Brethren would be instantaneously and eternally eradicated! Would to God it would be!

Part of what we can draw from this unity passage is that the unity that is being spoken of is mutually beneficial in many ways and produces “*good*” results. In Part One I talked about the *anointed ambience*, or supernatural atmosphere, that was manifest in the Early Church as a result of the apostolic dimension that was present among them. What it generated was works of supernatural power in the form of healing, deliverance, and miracles as well as supernatural working in the lives and relationships of the believers. The result of it all was that the Jerusalem Church was “*having favor with all the people,*” and “*the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*” Certainly that would qualify as “*good*” results of the “*brothers dwell(ing) together in unity!*”

The unity passage also described this kind of unity that occurs when the Brethren live in harmony and oneness of purpose, or *koinonia*, as “*pleasant*.” Pleasant is defined as giving or affording pleasure or enjoyment; agreeable; pleasing in manner, behavior, or appearance; amiable, fair and comfortable (as in pleasant weather); merry; lively. When Brethren gather and live their lives in community, all of those elements are manifest. And when they are, that certainly is **pleasant!** Where that kind of community exists, it always exists because of the Presence of God, and the Presence of God is manifest there because there is a core group of true worshipers who are worshiping Him in Spirit and Truth, which causes God to inhabit the praises of His people. And, wherever the Presence of the Lord is, the atmosphere is to say the least—**pleasant!** It is pleasant because where the Spirit of the Lord truly is present and truly is Lord rather than humans, there is always discernible liberty, liberality, and liberation from the influences of demons (2 Cor. 3:17).

However, there is nothing whatsoever pleasant about the obverse of that—the atmosphere in which human predomination is manifest. In groups where it prevails—where the leadership is wittingly or unwittingly employing witchcraft to dominate, control, and subjugate the followers—there is a distinctive foul, foreboding, fiendish sense of demonic captivity tangibly present and readily discernible to those not bewitched by its spell. Indeed, when the interrelations among the members of a group are not a “*good and pleasant*” experience, chances are the “unity” being promoted and pursued is not a *bona fide* unity emanating from the Spirit of the Lord, but rather a *bogus* man-centered “unity” characterized by bondage, restriction, constriction, and demonic activity and attack.

All of these conditions are indicative of the spirit of divination or witchcraft, which some expositors posit is symbolized in Scripture as the Python Spirit. A python is a huge specie of snake often 20 feet or more in length that kills its prey by wrapping itself around its victim and squeezing or “constricting” it until it crushes or asphyxiates it. Constriction is the primary modus operandi of witchcraft. Its ultimate goal is to squeeze the life right out of its prey. That’s precisely what happens to followers of spiritual leaders who are exercising witchcraft over them—eventually they become spiritually crushed, the Pneuma (Breath) of God, the Holy Spirit, spiritual life, is squeezed right out of them, and they die of spiritual asphyxiation.

Coerced Conformity

There are two other distinctive characteristics of this type of false unity predicated on and supposedly emanating out of this erroneous version of “covenant relationships”—coerced conformity and required or expected uniformity. Here again the nature of a counterfeit is demonstrated. A counterfeit by definition is a fraudulent copy of an original, a mock up of the real. It has the appearance of the real thing, but it really is not the real thing. It is a pretense of the real thing, but it only feigns the nature of the real thing. It is a phony, a fake, a sham, a falsification, a fraud. The intent of the counterfeit is to defraud by making you think you have the real thing but you really don’t.

In the case of the hyper-authoritarian counterfeit of “covenant relationships” and the sham unity it engenders, the very valid principle of interdependency and fraternal responsibility among believers is extended beyond its proper import and intent to virtually nullify and eliminate any semblance of personal autonomy and individuality. Contrary to the prevailing “wisdom” within much of Christendom, “autonomy,” “individuality,” and the much-maligned “independence” are not “four-letter words.” In their proper application and context, these concepts are not at all incongruous with the Divine Nature and Christ-likeness. Ezekiel’s vision of a wheel within a wheel portrays the precept of “*interdependence with independence*” inherent in the Kingdom of God and which is to exist in the administration and the interrelations of the Church of God.

God has created every human-being with a will, or volition, and endowed us all with the inviolable right to self-rule, or autonomy. So inviolable is that prerogative that not even God will violate or impinge upon it. Even when we choose to subject and subordinate our will unto God’s as Jesus Himself did in the Garden of Gethsemane, that in itself is a voluntary exercising of our own free will. We *choose* to submit and subject our

will and purposes unto God and His will and purposes, but He never *coerces* us to do so.

It may come as a surprise to some, but being Born Again does not mean that we forfeit our free will and right to self-rule in order to become some sort of mindless spiritual robot or zombie. Even after the Holy Spirit inhabits our being, we are still free moral agents, and are given the prerogative and privilege of operating in accordance with God's revealed will, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us by His inner promptings and urgings, submitting to His desires, and thereby allowing Him to live His Life through us. Being a *willing* participant in this cooperative coexistence is the great joy and privilege of it all. We are not compelled and coerced, but entreated and enabled.

Even when we are indeed Born Again, inhabited by the Spirit of God, and have become doers of His Word—active cooperatives for God on this planet—we still are not merely a contingent of identical “clones.” Even then, we still have a certain amount of individuality, we still have the right of self-governance, or autonomy, and we are even given a certain kind and degree of latitude and independence within the bounds of righteousness. Independence is not intrinsically evil. While there is a certain amount of *interdependence* inherent in our relationships as members of the Body of Christ, nonetheless, God made us *independent* as well. Though those two concepts may sound *contradictory*, in fact they are not, but rather are quite *congruous*.

Yet in churches and ministries where predomination or hyper-authoritarianism is flowing down through the leadership unto the members, there is a definitive usurpation of their free will and right to self-governance. The followers are indoctrinated to believe that God requires them to surrender their will unto the will of their spiritual leaders, and that they must receive the approval of their leader(s) for major and in many groups even mundane decisions of life. They are taught that Scripture teaches that they must conform to the dictates and desires of their “masters in the Lord.” This “coerced conformity” often starts out small and seems somewhat innocuous, but then continues to increase and expand until it is invasive and eventually pervasive. The victim is no longer his own or even God's, but the slave of some flesh and blood human.

Required Uniformity

The other characteristic of this fallacious unity is that of “required uniformity.” True unity is not and does not require uniformity. Too often, however, people perceive unity as being uniformity. In fact, it is quite a common thing among humans to view diversity as opposition and even as a threat. People are commonly suspicious, distrusting, and unaccepting of anyone who is significantly different than they. Sadly, that is too frequently the case among believers also, both individually as well as the groups they comprise. But true “*unity of the Spirit*” engenders a oneness and fellowship with members of the Body of Christ actuated in the natural, physical realm, however, based purely on “likenesses” in, of, and by the Holy Spirit. True unity can never be attained on the basis of our fickle carnal personal likes and dislikes. Rather, “*the unity of the Spirit*” is a unanimity *in, of, and by* the Spirit, produced by the confluence of diversity to create a complimentary and harmonious concinnity (working together) of “*the body for the building up of itself in love*” (Eph. 4:16).

All of Creation itself makes it abundantly clear that uniformity is not a God thing at all. And, if it's not a *God* thing, it certainly is not a *good* thing. God, like so much of His Creation, created us all unique. There's no carbon copy of any of us anywhere. We are **all** “one of a kind,” not just the “weirdos” to whom that term is often attributed. God delighted in making us all unique and so we should embrace it and learn to appreciate and like those things about us that distinguish us. It is okay to be different than everyone else. After all, even God called us “*a peculiar people*,” and I always like to add, “some more peculiar than others.” We all have things about us that make us “weird” to somebody else. We all have what others consider idiosyncrasies, and that's okay, as long as it is indeed idiosyncrasies and not neurosis or psychosis.

Today, with the prevalence of amateur psychology in our culture, it is common for people to try make a *character* issue out of what is in reality merely a *personality* issue. I enjoyed immensely what Graham Cooke

said in different contexts concerning the uniqueness of his personality, in his book, *A Divine Confrontation*, which I highly recommend:

It is too easy to make a character issue out of a personality trait. I am an introvert; that is my personality. I like who I am. I am pleased with how God made me. I am quiet, shy, and can be difficult to get to know on a personal level. I do confide in people, but I have to know them really well. I have been accused of being secretive and evasive about my private life. Some of that was due to lack of rapport and trust. Mostly it was because people expected self-disclosure from me in the manner that an extrovert would share.

Introverts share differently. We perceive, speak, and act quite differently from outgoing, expressive people. Extroverts may talk very freely when they are comfortable with people. They can share their life story in an hour. Introverts will drop clues that need following up. They need to see ongoing evidence of love, concern, and affirmation as they disclose themselves.²

Who am I, Graham Cooke? I'm an introvert, and I love my personality. It is a gift of God to me. I'm quite shy and reflective by nature. I adore silence. I have my moments of madness in humor and can be quite funny. I know hundreds of people who are better than me at what I do, but I do not feel inferior to them. I love being with them, and I actively seek out my betters to learn from them.

I love depending totally on the Lord. My personality tends to sit easily with God's requirements for vulnerability, inadequacy, and weakness as prerequisites for knowing His strengths. I do not like platforms, and I do not find it easy to be a speaker on public view, though I am often told that I am good at it. I blame God for that.

I work best under pressure. I do not mind tough situations. I relish the battle. For me, spiritual warfare is about the majesty and supremacy of Jesus, not the power of the devil. I like cold beer. And soccer. I don't want recognition; I prefer anonymity. I want to beat the devil, to make him pay. I like a glass of wine with a meal and lots of friends to share it with. I love the way the Irish speak.³

Perhaps the reason I loved what Graham wrote so much is that every word and sentence through the last one I quoted described me to a "T" (except the part about soccer, sorry). To be honest, though, until I read his book, I was not as liberated as he is concerning self-disclosure, but I think his writing what he did has helped me in that department. The point is, though, that we are all unique and God has made our personalities what they are, so just relax in them, and be at peace. A few years back the Lord did begin to liberate me internally about how that even my likes and dislikes, my personal preferences, were part of how he has made me. That was liberating. More and more, I am coming to be at peace with who God has made me. It hasn't been easy, and I haven't arrived fully yet, but I think the rest of the journey is pretty much downhill from here.

Let me say that I highly recommend that you too take a cue from this discussion about personality for your own life if you are at the place in your life that you can do that, because the benefit is that the more the God-kind of love for ourself increases, the more capacity we have to love others unfiltered and unfettered, for Jesus taught that we love others *as* we love ourselves.

It is imperative to understand that personality traits are not character traits. Personality is innate; character is cultivated. Personality is inward; character is outward. Personality is about ourselves; character is about others. And, "*It was for freedom that Christ set us free, so keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery*" (Gal. 6:1). Freedom is now a choice for those in Christ. We are the only ones who can make us slaves again. Most of us have kept the yoke of slavery upon our own necks by being a slave to what others think about us. That is such bondage! One of the toughest, yet most rewarding pursuits of life is the quest to be ourselves! Be who God has made you! The two great quests of life in Christ is to learn who God is in us and who we are in Him! The greatest freedom is the freedom to be yourself! Be **you!**

We have to remember that most people, especially before they die to themselves in Christ, are narcissists, who only love themselves, and therefore dislike anyone who is different than they. Insecure and inferiority-minded people are threatened by anyone that is significantly different than themselves as well. The spirit of religion makes people internally insecure, fearful, and inferiority-minded, so they are threatened by anyone who dares to live outside the box of their “god.” But, we serve that “unknown God” Paul told the Greeks he served. We’re His bond-slave, and none other’s. So, let us throw off the bonds of slavery. Let us praise and worship our God in the midnight hour, not only for who HE is, but who WE are in Him, and bring about such a shaking all around us that like Peter and James our prison cell doors will be jolted open and we can walk out of our prison cells of our own making free men and women of God, bound to no one except God Himself, and determined to become conformed into the Image of Christ (Rom. 8:29), and equally determined to resist all pressures to be conformed into anyone else’s image! Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we refuse to bow down to any other image of purported deity!

If each of us will walk in who we are in Christ, walk in the Divine Nature of which we have been made partakers, walk by the Spirit, then we will not be carrying out the divisive deeds of the flesh that separate us and preclude us from walking in oneness, and then we will automatically be walking in “*the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,*” for we will have “*put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity*” (Col. 3:14).

In the next and final part we will take a look at some of the effects of false unity and what it keeps us from possessing that God desires and has made provision for us to possess. We will also examine the limitations of true unity.

Endnotes:

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² Graham Cooke, *A Divine Confrontation*, p. 106; Destiny Image, Shippensburg, PA.

³ *Ibid*, p. 241.

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