

By David C. Hairabedian
www.davidhairabedian.com
Email: davidhairabedian@gmail.com



No Divisions Among You

NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU

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Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. (1Cor. 15:1-5, NIV)

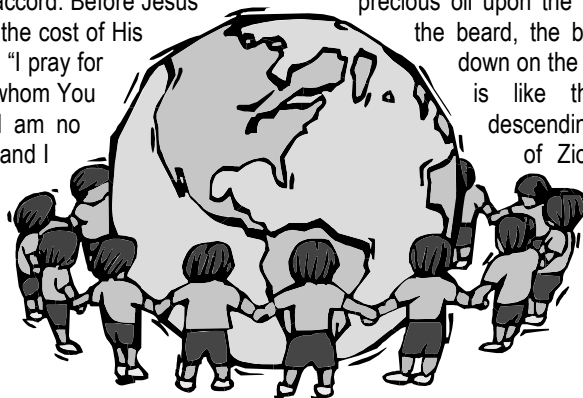
For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Eph. 2:8-9, NIV)

God is a God of **addition** and **multiplication**. "And the Lord **added** to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:47, NIV); "And the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem" (Acts 6:7, NKJV). Conversely, Satan is in the **subtraction** and **division** business. "The thief [Satan] comes only to steal, kill and destroy" (Jn. 10:10, RSV). Satan's job is to steal, subtracting from the flock of God, one, two, three, or more sheep at a time. He also thrives on division, bringing rifts and splits into the flocks of God's sheep. The Apostle Paul addressed this issue in his letters to the Churches he'd planted. To one flock he wrote: "But dear brothers, I beg you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so that there won't be splits in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose" (1Cor. 1:10, LVB). He went on to ask, "Is Christ divided?" (v. 13).

Jesus calls believers to unity, to be of one accord. Before Jesus went to the Cross to purchase our freedom at the cost of His own life, he spoke to the Father for us, saying, "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours... Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, **that they may be one** as We are... I do not pray

for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **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." (Jn. 17:9, 11, 20-21 NKJV). Jesus prayed that we would be one. We could experience divine unity in Him. Just as He and the Father are one, so He prayed that we would be one in Him and the Father. Notice he didn't pray this for the world, but rather for the Church, that there would be no divisions among His flocks, but rather unity. Why is unity so important? "...that they all may be one...**that the world may believe that You sent Me.**" (Jn. 17:21 NKJV). Unity brings belief that the Father sent Jesus resulting in salvations, **addition** and **multiplication**, to the flock of God, and expanding Christ's influence in the world.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in **unity!** It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing life forevermore. (Ps.



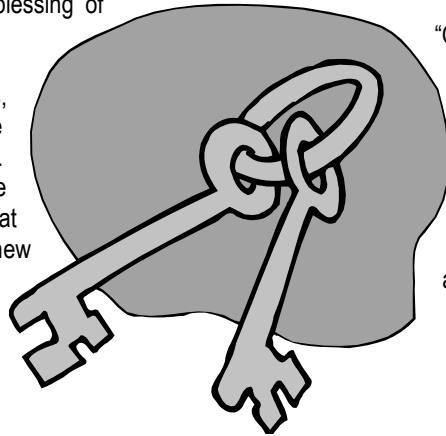
Unity amongst the Brethren results in at least **three** gifts from Heaven: 1.) Unity brings "goodness" and "pleasantness" to the Body of Christ (v. 1). 2.) Unity brings the God's oil upon the head (Christ) that flows down over the garments (the body of Believers) (v. 2). 3.) Unity brings the God's "commanded blessing" (v. 3). When God's goodness is flowing through the congregation, it is a pleasure to attend Church. It is easy to say, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." (Ps. 122:1, KJV) .Unity brings the oil of God. God's oil is His presence, His power, His voice, His anointing, and the aroma of Himself. A service where God shows up in this manner refreshes the Body of Christ. Healing flows like water to the thirsty soul. Forgiveness runs like a river. God's sheep are reconciled right there in the service; often in tears, hugging one another. The outflow of this activity brings the "commanded blessing of God" (v. 3). Sheep are added to the Church (new converts), and the number of disciples multiplies greatly (pew sitters are called into discipleship by the Lord). This is the multifaceted outpouring of unity within the Body of Christ. Is this happening where in your congregation or prison church environment?

SOME PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

God desires this Psalms 133 unity in every one of His Son's congregations on earth. "...that there be no divisions among you..." (1Cor. 1:10). In Israel, at the time King David wrote this Psalm there were twelve different tribes involved in the congregation. Each tribe had a different calling from God. For example, the Levites were called to the Priesthood, they took care of the temple activities. Then there was the tribe of Judah, their name meant praise and they were leaders. The tribe of Zebulun were sailors. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (the sons of Joseph) received a double blessing and were the bankers. (Yes, even then, there were businessmen, called by God for that purpose.) The list goes on, each individual tribe with a different calling, yet all twelve tribes in **perfect unity**. They experienced the commanded blessing of God. Twelve regiments of God's one army, but without any division among them. The same unity was present during the reign of David's son, Solomon.

"...indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers **were as one**, to make **one sound** to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord, and when they lifted up **their voice** with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying: 'For He is good, for His mercy endures forever,' that the house, the house of the Lord, was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; **for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God.**" (2Chron. 5:13-14, KJV). God's glory came down as the people "were as one." Again, unity brought the commanded blessing of God.

As we read the book of Acts, many examples of unity are present throughout the chapters. The apostles understood the power of unity and strove for it at all times. Why? Because they knew it was Jesus' will. "I pray for



them...that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. (Jn. 17:9,21, NKJV). Moreover, unity would bring the commanded blessing of God the Father. The Day of Pentecost is an example. "...**they were all with one accord** in one place, and suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where they were sitting...and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost...and the same day there were **added unto them about three thousand souls**" (Acts 2:1-4,41). Unity, one accord, brought the empowerment of God's ointment; His anointing, presence, and power to win three thousand souls to Christ. In the following chapter, another 5,000 souls were added to the Church (Acts 4:1-4). "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; and **great grace was upon them all**" (Acts 4:33, KJV). How was this great grace released from Heaven? These same apostles had just been beaten, persecuted, imprisoned for their faith, and told not to preach in the Name of Jesus anymore. What did they do?

They got together with the rest of the Church family and prayed. "As soon as they were freed, Peter and John found the other disciples and told them what the Council had said. Then **all the believers united** in this prayer..." (Acts 4:23-24). None of the apostles was a "lone soldier," but rather returned to the house of Believers and asked for prayer. Everyone got involved, as one body. The result? "After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook **and they were ALL filled with the Holy Spirit and boldly preached God's message.**" (v. 31, LVB). Unity brought the commanded blessing of God. Unity brought a fresh infilling of the Holy Ghost to ALL who were present as well as a new level of Spirit-empowered authority for everyone to speak the word of God with boldness. The apostles demonstrated unity. God demonstrated his response to unity. "And great grace was upon them all. Neither was there any among them that lacked" (v. 33-34, KJV). Unity brings God's presence, his power, his grace, his soul-winning boldness, a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit for all who are joined in agreement, and a spirit of sharing so that no one lacks any thing they need. Is this happening where you are?

PRISON ACCOUNTS

During the last fifteen years God has given me the opportunity to serve my time at seven different facilities; being transferred to lower security levels as time passes. At five of these seven facilities, a genuine unity of the Brethren was sought after and achieved, resulting in the Psalms 133 blessing. Souls were saved, lives transformed, and men grew in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the other two facilities, the devil had a heyday with the Body of Christ, bringing division and strife into the congregation. Sadly, at these two facilities, the following "false commission" seemed to be present:

"Go ye amongst the brethren and pick a quarrel – see that strife and division remain in the forefront of the body, so that souls may perish unharvested, the church may suffer reproach; signs, wonders, and miracles are quenched; and Satan may dance with glee --- then each Believer may become an isolated island unto himself, instead of the one Body of Christ in unity and fellowship" (Satire on Mk. 16:15-20).

To ensure this doesn't happen in your fellowship, I want to share six things that will help nurture biblical unity and insulate your local congregation from division and strife. These six things are very simple and easy to apply once we choose to do them. James admonishes, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (Js. 1:22, NIV). I encourage you to make a positive decision to put these six principles into practice for thirty days and watch what God does in response.

SIX KEYS TO BIBLICAL UNITY

The **first** of the five keys is: **Focus on the absolutes of Scripture**. Never lose focus on the absolutes (Christ died for our sins, was buried in the tomb, and on the third day was resurrected from the dead), and get wrong focused on what I refer to as peripheral issues. All these issues are too numerous to name, but a few are provided as examples. **Arguing over worship styles**; standing, kneeling, hands raised, hands unraised, dancing versus no dancing, etc... Did you know that there are over 25 different scriptural movements, motions and emotions of worship in the Bible? King David even danced before the ark of the Lord in the midst of the people in his underwear (see 2Sam. 6:12-20). When David's wife, Michal saw it she "despised him in her heart" (v. 16). Then she made the horrendous mistake of speaking against David's expression of worship. "When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, 'How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!'" (v. 20, NIV). David responded by saying, "I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor" (v. 22, NIV). The Bible goes on to record these words, "And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death" (v. 23, NIV). The message here is that speaking against some one else's expression of worship before the Lord can make us spiritually barren.

If it's not an issue that contradicts Scriptural absolutes, leave it alone. We are not called to be Sheriffs in the body of Christ. The Holy Ghost is the one who convicts. There are no Holy Ghost Juniors in the Godhead. We are called to pray for those we think are in error. If they are wrong, may the Lord convict and change them. If we are in error, may the Lord convict and change us. But, let us all be changed into the image and likeness of His Son by God's grace, remaining in biblical unity in the process. Otherwise, if we choose to set ourselves up as judge, jury, and executioner on matters, we may, like David's wife, Michal, end up spiritually barren until the day of our death. Other issues that I've seen unnecessarily divide the body of Christ in prison settings are **arguments over the doctrine of once saved always saved -vs. - you can lose your salvation**. The Bible has scriptural support for both doctrines. Therefore, the arguments could be endless as both parties quote the Word and contend for the faith. Jesus taught, "But he who endures to the end will be saved." (Mt. 10:22; 24:13; Rev. 2:10-11). Agree to focus on enduring to the end in our faith walk with Jesus. Both camps agree on this. That will end the disagreements and

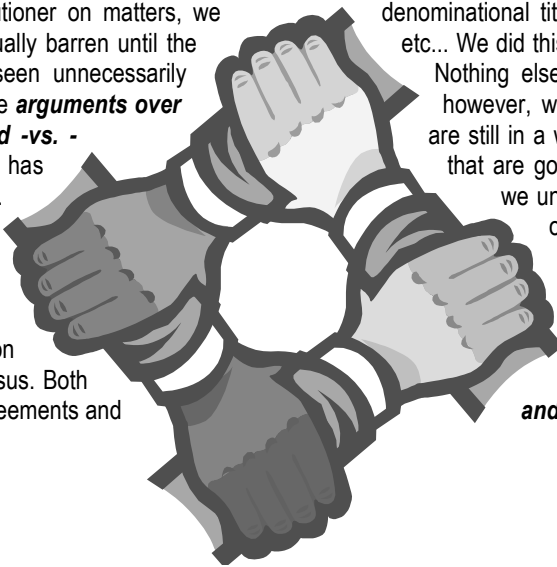
help nurture biblical unity on this issue. In so doing, Christ crucified may be preached and souls will respond to this absolute message of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, and be saved.

Another issue that should never divide us is our **preference in style of water baptism**. Some churches dunk, others sprinkle, and I'm sure there may even be a group somewhere that dry cleans! Bottom line is if they are comfortable with it, and the Holy Spirit has not convicted them, then who are you to speak against it? Salvation comes by faith in Jesus. If you want to be dry cleaned after you're saved, I'll attend and support you. Remember, the absolutes of Scripture, Christ's death on a Cross, his burial in a tomb and his resurrection on the third day, that's an absolute (1Cor. 15:1-6). Preference in water baptism, color of carpets, taking of communion (leavened bread or unleavened bread, grape juice or a small cup of wine), standing or sitting in worship, are all peripheral issues and should never disrupt our unity with one another. Got it! Okay, let's move on to the second key, which is really an offshoot from focusing on the absolutes of Scripture.

The **second** key is: **Always look for ways in which we are alike instead of focusing in on how we are different**. By realizing that we have far more in common than not, we will find ourselves in biblical unity more rapidly and God's blessing will fall from Heaven in response. Did you know that Christians agree on 98% of the Bible and that the other 2% is primarily non-issues for all practical purposes? We must strive for unity, focusing on what we have in common. Let me give you an example. Right after the United States was attacked by terrorists during 9-11, the entire nation unified. All denominations of Protestant Christianity came together, putting down their peripheral doctrinal differences, and joining in prayer before the God of the Bible. Protestants joined with Catholic believers from around the nation, and God responded to our unity. Even the Democrats and Republicans came together for a unanimous vote. The atmosphere was amazing in our nation as people reached out like the good Samaritan, helping those in need around them. The inmates even took up a collection at our prison, collectively sending \$2000 from our accounts to the Salvation Army in New York as a gesture of support for the victims in need from this atrocity. We focused in on what we had in common. Our nation (possibly our families: Mom, Dad, wife, children, etc...) could be the next victims. We joined together as one in a spirit of unity, and God showed up in response. Different church congregations from all over the city gathered in a football stadium, 40,000 deep, to pray all night for our nation's safety. We exalted the title of Christian above our denominational title of Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, etc... We did this because we had Christ in common.

Nothing else mattered in a time of war. Sadly, however, we have forgotten, post-9/11, that we are still in a war, a spiritual war over souls. Souls that are going to go to hell unharvested unless we unify as the Body of Christ, focusing in on ways we are alike. We need to get back to the right focus on our common Rock, Jesus. This leads into our third principle.

The **third** key is: **Promote Christ and His Word above your particular**



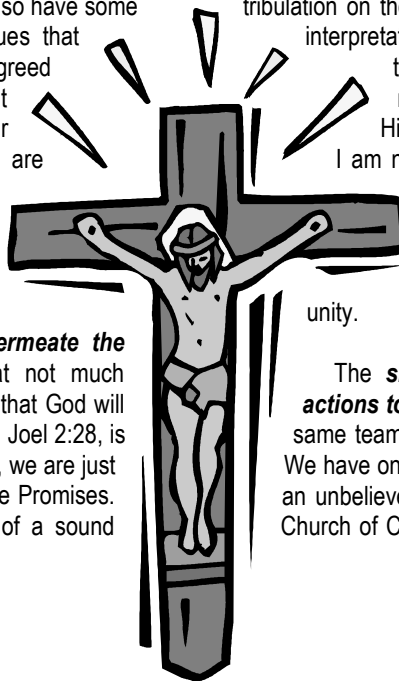
church or way of doing things. This also is the natural outflow of focusing on the absolutes, and subsequently promotes unity. Before I even knew there were differences between Believers, I was sent to my second facility. At the first facility, we had experienced such a divine unity, focusing in on what we had in common, that I didn't know that divisive differences existed within the Body of Christ. When I arrived, my real education started. It was a bittersweet time. A Christian Brother who was on fire for the Lord began to fellowship with me. He asked me what I believed. I told him, "I believe in Jesus and love him with all my heart." He pressed me further, asking me what denomination I was. I said, "Born Again." He said, "I'm born again too, but what denominational background." I replied, "If it's in the Bible, I believe it; Jesus is Lord of my life." He laughed and said, "I believe everything in the Bible too, but where do you stand on the gifts of the Spirit." I said, "If it's in the Bible I believe it." He said, "But do you believe those things are for today?" I said, "I believe Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever, just like Hebrews 13:8 says he is."

He laughed again and then said, "I believe that too, but I believe in dispensational theology." I said, "Dispensational what?" He went on to explain that he was a cessationist, meaning that the gifts of the Spirit had ceased with the apostles. I told him, "Oh, well then God must have reactivated them earlier this year again, because I witnessed all kinds of them in operation at the previous facility." He looked at me shocked and said we would have to talk about this more at a later time. We did. We also agreed to disagree agreeably about such peripheral doctrines, and focus in on winning souls with the gospel. He was such a dynamic soul-winner and fruitful Believer that I couldn't help but team up with him. We didn't agree on every issue and even had some private conversations that became, at times, intense fellowship, but we always agreed to disagree agreeably. We also never talked about these peripheral issues when other Brothers were around. We learned a lot from each other in this manner. "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17, RSV). The result: souls were saved, the Body of Christ unified around the absolutes of Scripture, and God's blessing rained down from heaven. This Brother and I have remained great friends over the years. He has been out for more than a decade now, is presently a Senior Pastor in California, and has helped grow a church of 100 members to more than 1,300. He also married a delightful Christian girl who happens to believe that the gifts of the Spirit are still in operation today! I imagine they also have some private conversations about the peripheral issues that they don't also agree completely on, but have agreed to disagree agreeably. They both always exalt Christ and His Word above their particular denominational background. As a result, souls are being saved, the Brethren love one another and God's blessings are evident in his ministry that has grown ten-fold in ten years. Can you say the same of your effectiveness for Jesus?

The **fourth** key is: **Pray that God will permeate the people with His Presence.** I've learned that not much happens without God's presence. Thus, praying that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, as He promised in Joel 2:28, is a significant key to revival. Without His Presence, we are just sitting on the premises instead of standing on the Promises. Twelve years ago, the Lord woke me up out of a sound

sleep, called me by name and posed this question, "How are men's souls saved?" I thought for a moment and couldn't really muster a good answer. I then realized that when God asks you a question, it's not because he's seeking information, but seeking to teach. Finally, I said, "I don't know, Lord, how are men's souls saved?" The Holy Spirit replied with the words that would change the way I would pray for people from that day forward. He said, "It is the Presence of God that convicts a man of his sin. The Presence of God withdrawn means sin will remain." That made perfect sense! From then on, I have asked God to permeate those I'm praying for with His Presence. Since praying this way, I've witnessed God's Spirit convict unbelievers of sin and they literally come up and ask, "What must I do to be saved?" Before the Holy Spirit gave me this spiritual key for more effective praying, I didn't see nearly as much fruit. Now I trust Him to do the work and I've become a co-laborer with him, like the hammer in the carpenter's hand. Prior to this experience, I thought I was the carpenter, trying to pound the Gospel into the unsaved, doing it for God. Remember, it's the Presence of God that convicts a man of his sin and need for Jesus. We just show up on the scene after He had already dealt with them. No man goes to the Father unless He draws him. Pray that God will permeate the people with His presence. Once that is accomplished, you are ready for the next key to biblical unity.

The **fifth** key is: **Respect and appreciate one another's respective interpretations of Scripture.** Again, this doesn't mean you have to embrace their interpretation, but you must respect it. Let me give you an example. You see a man who tells you that his wife is the most beautiful woman in the world and his children are the most intelligent. You have to respect his opinion, but you certainly don't have to embrace it as your view. People's pet doctrines can be this way at times. Sometimes think they have the only truth on a subject. Take, for example, the doctrine of the rapture (Christ's physical return to catch away his church in the air). There are literally hundreds, if not thousands of books written on this subject. The greater number of these books have been authored by genuine Christians who believe 98 percent of the same things you and I believe. However, on this specific eschatological (end times) subject there are three main camps; Pre-Tribulationists (meaning Christ is returning to get His Church before the Tribulation begins); Mid-Tribulationists (Christ is returning in the middle of the Tribulation); and Post-Tribulationists (Christ is returning after the seven years of tribulation on the earth). Each of these three camps has its own interpretation on this matter. Each has its list of Scriptures to support their interpretation. This is a peripheral matter. The absolute fact that Christ is coming for His Church is the thing we all agree on. Personally, I am not Pre-Trib, Mid-Trib or Post-Trib, I'm Pan-Trib. I'm serving Jesus with all my heart until He returns and I am confident that it will all "pan out" in the end. With this in mind, let's move to the final key that opens the door for biblical



unity.

The **sixth** key is: **Practice supportive speech and actions toward one another.** Remember, we are all on the same team. We are fighting one common enemy, the devil. We have one common goal, to win the lost to Christ. Whether an unbeliever is saved in a Methodist, Episcopalian, Baptist, Church of Christ, Charismatic, or non-denominational Church

that preaches Jesus as the Way, the Truth, and the Life, their name goes into the Lamb's Book of Life with the same color ink, Christ's Blood. For this reason, we need to practice supportive speech and actions towards our Brothers and Sisters from all authentic Christ-preaching Churches, regardless of whether they are Pre-, Mid- or Post-tribulationists; whether they dunk, sprinkle or dry clean their new converts; even if they sit, stand, fall prostrate or do cartwheels during worship. Dancing in their underwear is okay with me, too, as long as they do it in the privacy of their own home! Let me share one final illustration with you on the subject of us all being on the same team. The U.S. Military has five divisions: Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, with the President of the United States as Commander in Chief. Ultimately, they all respond upward to one man. It's the same with the Body of Christ. We are many different divisions (denominations) that respond to one commander in Chief, the Lord Jesus Christ. We go into battle together. Each of us has our specific area of expertise, callings and gifts to defeat the powers of darkness. We cannot say that we don't need one another. None of us is a one-man evangelizing band. The Intercessors do their part. The evangelists do their part. The Teachers do their part. The Pastors do their part. We are "one body, many parts" (1Cor. 12:11). If we want the Father's blessing, it's time that we strive for biblical unity with our Brethren. We're going to have to spend eternity with them in Heaven anyway. We might as well start working together now here on earth, plundering hell to populate heaven with the one and only saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. He died for you and me on a Cross 2,000 years ago, he was buried in the tomb and on the third day, He rose from the dead! Do you believe? Are you cleansed of sin by the Blood of the Lamb? If so, it's great having you as part of the army of Believers with Jesus Christ as our Commander and Chief! Amen.