

Unity in the Church

The letter that follows addresses one of the great issues facing the Church today – the lack of unity in the body of Christ. Sadly, although many recognize this as a real problem, few believe there is anything that can be done about it. It would appear that the numerous splinter groups that have emerged over the past several years are entrenched and have absolutely no plans of joining other groups. To some degree this lack of unity may be driven by genuine principle. Some may see certain teachings by other groups as unacceptable. However, even if this is the case, the brazen disrespect certain organizations have for each other could only be driven by ego.

The lack of unity in the Church today is a source of great shame on leader and member alike and God's people should be embarrassed for having allowed this to happen. This letter is an appeal to all of God's people to understand the importance of unity and what it is sacrificing because of its intransigence.



Blow the Trumpet

Proclaiming the Gospel as a Witness

To All the Saints
In the Churches of God

Re: A New Commandment

Dear Brethren,

Just a few weeks ago, President George W. Bush was elected to a second term as America's Chief Executive. This brought an end to what was arguably the most bitter and polarizing campaign in our nation's history. For nearly a year, two of our country's premier leaders and their surrogates waged a war of words whose wounds only served to more deeply divide us. Having followed both campaigns with some interest, it is hard for me to imagine why anyone would ever want to pursue a life in politics.

Today, millions of Americans anxiously watch as this nation now moves forward into an uncertain future. What makes this path even more perilous is that instead of a common will driving our country, an angry invisible nation festers in its midst—one that has a different agenda altogether. It would be nice to say that "time heals all wounds." But sadly, that just doesn't seem to be the case.

With this in mind, is there a lesson for God's people to glean from all this political madness? Is there a message waiting to be discovered by those whom He has called according to His purpose? Is it possible that God's Church today is playing out a similar story—one that is also defined by divisiveness and rancor?

Since the passing of Herbert W. Armstrong almost two decades ago, a slow but steady erosion has taken place within God's church. What was once a strong community with a common faith and a singleness of purpose has now become seemingly disoriented. As a result, a unified core of beliefs that once defined God's people has now been replaced by a collection of peripheral ideas all disguised as "critical doctrine." Nearly every week we hear about a "New Group" being raised up. Additionally, each of these groups

describe themselves as having unique qualities and beliefs—qualities and beliefs that make their cause more real and their formation more just.

This is not to suggest that I believe these communities of faith are not legitimate Churches of God any more than I would suggest that estranged members of a family are not legitimately related. The point here is that if God's future kings and priests cannot get along, what hope is there of the secular world ever being able to do so? Furthermore, is there a far greater point God's people are blindly overlooking—a point that effects our very DESTINY! The real question we in the Church must come to grips with is this: What hope is there of God's people ever working together in a magnificent, incorruptible Kingdom if we refuse to work together now? Tragically, it would appear that we have become a microcosm of the world around us. In a very real sense, we now seem to reflect more of this world to God than we reflect God and His Kingdom to this world. This is a great tragedy and a total contradiction of our calling. Furthermore, we all bear some responsibility in this trespass.

Today, it would seem that denigrating each other has become an obsession within the Church. The question is: WHY? Why would people who need a Savior so much think of their brethren as unfit for one? Why would any leader be so presumptuous as to believe he is God's favorite? Does anyone actually think a parent loves one child more because that child is smarter, better looking, stronger or more talented than the others? Read the parable of "The Prodigal Son" if you do (Lk. 15:11-32). Furthermore, is that how you think all parents should act? Think about this the next time you hear someone say, "We are the only Church God is using." or, "We are doing a bigger work." or, "We have more members, more readers, more listeners, and more income."

Come to think of it, who came up with the idea that income and new subscribers are somehow proof that a church is bearing fruit? Now I realize that Mr. Armstrong would also use numbers when describing growth in the Church. Who wouldn't? But there was something that distinguished him from every leader in God's Church today. This man NEVER, NEVER, NEVER took his eye off God's work. Mr. Armstrong's attachment to growth was not about validation. It was about greater opportunities to advance the cause of the Kingdom. Today it is very different. Growth is represented as a fruit that gives legitimacy. But is that the best test? What about persecution being a fruit of legitimacy? After all, Jesus spoke far more about His followers being hunted down and killed than He ever did about them growing in prominence and wealth. One only has to consider how the lives of the apostles (save John) came to an end to see the horrible flaw in this reasoning. The entire history of the Church down through the ages is one of persecution. Why should it ultimately be any different with us?

Now I am not suggesting that growth is not a blessing. For indeed it can be a great one. But if this is the standard by which God's people determine if a group is legitimate, then we had better prepare ourselves for a real SHOCK! I would suggest that all of us, myself included, "bone up" on what just might be around the corner. Perhaps we should start by reading about the fifth seal of Revelation (Rev. 6:9-11 See also: Mt. 10:22-28; 24:9-10, Heb. 11:32-40). These passages paint a grim picture for those who argue that "numbers don't lie," and "the bigger the better." Here is what your Bible says: the time is coming when the numbers are going to shrink; only the casualties will grow (Mk. 13:12-13, Lk. 21:16-17). Furthermore, that time is closer than we think!

Regrettably, it would seem that far too many of God's people somehow think that growth is God's expression of gratitude for a job well done and that persecution is somehow evidence that God's people have lost His favor. My guess is that when it comes to the latter, it just might be the opposite (2Cor. 4:17).

Furthermore, who said that size somehow equals strength and is something to be desired to make one legitimate? The last time King David used that formula, he found himself begging for God to deliver Israel from his own arrogance (1Chro. 21:17). The point here is that while some of the larger COG groups continually dismiss the smaller ones as illegitimate and smaller groups continue to think of large communities of faith as the "Catholicism" of the work, very little is getting done. Additionally, while so many approach the end time on the wings of some new doctrinal angle, or an attitude that says, "You'd better listen to me because I'm Mr. Armstrong's rightful successor, God's people become more fragmented. This couldn't possibly be what He had in mind (See: Jer. 23, Ezek. 34).

A Final Thought

Herbert W. Armstrong used to say that his favorite passage in the Bible was Psalm 133 which speaks of the beauty of unity. It is hard to take issue with such words. Sadly, the lives of God's people today seem to contradict them. Where there once was unity, there is now discord. Not entirely, but far too much. It seems that the only time many of the leaders and their flocks "stand down" in their war of words against each other is at a funeral. I guess it is just too uncivilized to bicker at such occasions.

My point in writing is not to "pile on" God's leaders or His people. This will be very apparent in my letter next month. What I am trying to convey is that in truth there is more that binds us together than should ever break us apart. We have a common history behind us and a common destiny that lies yet ahead. It is a shame that we may never share this wonderful journey together. Perhaps this is what makes our current state so tragic.

Finally, although none of us are the great and powerful, we have been called to do what no leader of any nation has ever done. We have been personally chosen by the Creator of Heaven and Earth to prepare the world for a New Administration—one presided over by a Great God King. And it would seem to me that although we may never hit 70 home runs in a season, or walk on the moon, or give a State of the Union address, we can do something that has tragically eluded mankind throughout human history. We can love one another (Jn. 14:34-35). This is our reasonable service.

Respectfully,

Dennis Fischer

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