

# Fulton County Gospel News

*Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World*

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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## WHEN GOD DEMANDS DIVISION

by Kent Bailey

When one preaches the truth of God in its plainness and simplicity one will present the gospel of peace. Indeed God is a God of mercy, peace and grace in that divine forgiveness provides such. However, there are conditions to be met by humanity before one can be recipients of divine forgiveness. When God's conditions of forgiveness and peace are rejected war with God ensues.

There is a peace authorized by God and there is a peace unauthorized by him. Within the context of Matthew chapter 10 we find that under the limited commission of Christ there was no way peace could exist between Judaism and God if the Jews rejected God's divine requirements of peace. As we consider the divine principles of New Testament truth today, there is no way for peace to exist between those who obey Christ and those who reject him.

A great many find this fundamental concept very shocking, however it is none the less true that God requires a certain type of division. Our responsibility is to ascertain truth. We must accept and live by God's standard of unity. When we so live such will bring about division. There are those who desire peace at any price. They are negative of anything that does not come under the purview of their open fellowship practices of unity in diversity. They desire to *sweep all our differences* under some nonexistent rug and then deny that unity finds its very existence upon the basis of divine truth. Yet due to their attitude of a pseudo-unity, spiritual Zion is drowning beneath the encroaching floodwaters of error and compromise.

Individuals make peace with Christ and his obedient followers today by their acceptance of and obedience to the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16-17). Therefore fellowship with God and his people is conditional. Such is conditional not only upon the basis of following God's spiritual laws of inclusion in becoming a Christians, but also in faithfulness to the Lord (Acts 2:42; 1 John

1:7; 2 John 9-11). It is thus possible to have obeyed the gospel of Christ, yet because of unfaithfulness be outside the Lord's approval and fellowship. Faithful followers of Christ both as individuals and as local churches recognize that God has drawn lines of fellowship, and that because of sin division is inevitable.

Such was realized upon the establishment of the Missionary Society, the acceptance of denominational baptism, the introduction of mechanical instrumental music in worship, the introduction of the false system of Premillennialism, the pseudo-unity effort of Ketcherside-ism, the New Unity movement, the Para-church movement, and now the encroaching efforts of big centralized efforts to control local churches under a single ruling and controlling eldership to popularize some pet project in that of raising money. When one considers the dangers of popularizing false doctrine and unauthorized practices in religion, one will readily take note of the danger of pseudo-unity.

**The type of division discussed in contrast to false unity.** As we carefully study Matthew 10:34-39 and Luke 12:51-53 we correctly conclude that the words of Christ are not contradictory, but rather are paradoxical when considered in light of true Biblical unity and fellowship (John 17:11-21; 8:32; 1 John 1:1-3). The only type of unity God authorizes is unity in truth.

Because of Christ we find division within homes. Our Lord spoke of this concept in the text used as the basis for our study (Matthew 10:34-39). Not all during the first century came to accept and obey God's truth. Even within the confines of the family unity did all obey the Lord. The same is true today. Even within the Lord's church, as we look at families, some family members are Christians and others may be religious, but are religiously wrong. Some may be Christians, i.e., members of the church, yet go beyond the doctrine of Christ in violation of 2 John 9-11

and have a broader concept of fellowship than authorized by the scriptures. When the faith of God recognize the line that God has drawn, this brings about division--division that is demanded by God.

**The application of this divine principle regarding division that God demands.** As previously noted there is a type of division that is sinful and that is condemned by God:

- Denominationalism (1 Corinthians 1:10-16).
- Seditions (Galatians 5:20).
- Those responsible for causing division by the promotion and/or practice of false doctrine or unauthorized practices (Romans 16:17-18).

As we have already noted there are various type of division, when accomplished, will bring about the purity of the New Testament church:

- Separation from unbelievers (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
- Separation from those who are immoral (1 Corinthians 5).
- Separation from those who practice heresy (Titus 3).
- Separation from compromise (Ephesians 5:1-11).
- Separation from false teachers and false teaching (2 John 9-11).

**When one correctly understands the New Testament principles of unity one will also understand when God demands division.** Unity is not the single most crucial priority of God's will and intent. Throughout the aspect of Biblical revelation we note divine approval of division in opposition to sin and approved unity based upon divine truth (Ephesians 4:1-15). May God grant us the courage to always stand for truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

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**UNSTABLE SOULS****Part Two**

by Lee Moses

The church of our Lord is in the throes of an apostasy the likes of which has not been seen in well over a century. Perhaps it should come as no surprise. The apostle Peter warned that many would follow the “*pernicious ways*” of false teachers; and he further stated the self-evident truth that “*unstable souls*” would be especially susceptible to beguiling (2 Peter 2:1-2, 14). And many souls in the church are dangerously unstable today. In the last issue of the *Fulton County Gospel News*, we considered the dangers of instability with regard to faith, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures, and the age of the earth. Let us reflect upon a couple of other areas in which souls are dangerously unstable.

**Unstable in Their Commitment to Bible Study**

When one considers the decreasing stability in the church over the past few decades, it is not difficult to observe a corresponding decrease in Bible study and Bible knowledge. Old-timers, even non-Christians, uniformly testify, “Growing up, there is one thing you could always say about members of the church of Christ—they **knew** their Bible!” In their homes, Christians regularly held family devotions, and frequently held Bible studies and “cottage meetings” with their neighbors. Many of them spent time every day, reading, re-reading, memorizing, and pondering

over Bible passages. Many could be found carrying in one of their pockets at all times a New Testament, so they could open small windows of free time throughout the work day to memorize Bible passages, or to have a ready authority to consult when engaged in religious discussions with co-workers.

Today, a solid majority of what calls itself the “church of Christ” is nearly Biblically illiterate. Few can provide Scriptural support for why denominationalism or instrumental music is wrong. Many would be hard-pressed to provide Scriptures that show the plan of salvation.

A professor at one of the “Christian” universities spoke of the sad state of affairs among his Bible students. For each semester’s final exam, he would ask students of his course on the book of John to discuss John 4:24 (“*God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*”). He stated that no student he had ever had at that university even attempted to discuss what is meant by “in truth.”

The church is in the midst of a self-induced famine of hearing the words of the LORD (cf. Amos 8:11). Should it then be any surprise that apostasy is overwhelming countless churches without their members even knowing it?

Peter warns his readers against being unstable, and repeatedly emphasizes the means of stability—**knowledge**, Biblical knowledge:

*Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord* (2 Peter 1:2).

*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue* (1:3).

*And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge* (1:5).

*Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth....Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance* (1:12, 15).

*...they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...* (2:20).

*Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ...* (3:17-18).

Peter linked being *unstable* with being **unlearned**—he spoke of how “*they that are unlearned and unstable wrest*,” or “twist” or “distort,” various “*scriptures, unto their own*

*destruction*” (2 Peter 3:16, *emph. LM*). And again, such instability makes one an easy target for Satan and false doctrines. If one is to prevent spiritual instability and its resultant vulnerability, he needs to ensure that he is not unlearned.

The word translated *unstable* in 2 Peter 2:14 and 3:16 very literally means, “unsupported.”<sup>1</sup> There is nothing firm standing underneath one so described. Yet Christians have in the Gospel “*a more sure word of prophecy*” (1:19). The word for “*more sure*” (*bebaioeron*) means “more reliable, something that can be relied on not to cause disappointment, unshifting.”<sup>2</sup> It also carries the idea of “abiding.”<sup>3</sup> The word of God provides the firm support that every soul needs. However, the support the word of God provides is largely dependent on one **knowing** what the word of God teaches. “The ‘unstable’ are those not firmly grounded in Christian [that is, **Biblical, LM**] teaching.”<sup>4</sup>

The church needs a greater commitment to Bible study. Preachers need to “*preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2). Bible classes need once again to become **Bible** classes, rather than a time to read through a denominational book or other such tripe. It is a crime that elders have left their flocks largely un-fed, and thus unstable and vulnerable. However, no man or woman can evade his individual culpability if he remains ignorant of the Scriptures. Each of us needs to be present at every assembly of the church, and each of us needs to spend private time every day with God’s word. Bible study must be approached humbly and reverently, with appreciation for the potentially devastating effects of a lackadaisical approach to Scripture (2 Pet. 3:16).

Job stated, “*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food*” (Job 23:12; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2). How often do we go an entire day without eating? However, many professed Christians think nothing of going days on end without a single glance upon the precious pages of the Bible. This is tragic neglect of the soul.

It is also tragic neglect of the Lord. The late brother B.C. Carr told of a woman who lost her son in battle. To comfort herself, she would shut herself in her room and listen to tape recordings of his voice.<sup>5</sup> Why did she do this? She obviously did this because she loved her son, and wanted to hear him. Every person who has a loved one overseas longs for letters from that loved one, and immediate tears it open and reads it when it comes in the mail. And he probably reads that letter over multiple times, and reads it to other people. God’s dwelling place may presently be far removed from us, but He has spoken to us in the Bible (Hebrews 1:1-2; 2 Timothy 3:16). If we truly love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37), we will want to read what He has to say over and over again, and to tell what He has to say to others.

## Unstable on the Essence of Unity and Fellowship

Many souls have been swayed to error because of gross misunderstanding, or utter lack of conviction, regarding unity and fellowship. Christ prayed for the unity of His followers (John 17:20-21). The psalmist astutely exclaimed, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1). Every Christian desires unity and appreciates the blessings of Christian fellowship. The nineteenth-century preacher Barton W. Stone and his followers cried the mantra, “Let unity be our polar star.” However, it is a misleading mantra. In pursuit of “unity as their polar star,” many have disregarded doctrinal and practical deviations from Scripture, which disregard is itself a deviation from Scripture (Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Thessalonians 3:6). The Roman Catholic Church has a “Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity”—however, until this council advocates eradicating unauthorized councils, the pope, and the Roman Catholic Church, it does nothing to promote true Christian unity. Similar things could be said about many so-called “unity” efforts taking place today.

Unity refers to a state of **oneness**. Oneness cannot coexist with plurality, at least not in the same matters. There cannot be several contrary teachings on what constitutes acceptable worship, and at the same time be **unity** on what constitutes acceptable worship. There cannot be several contrary teachings on marriage, divorce, and marriage, and at the same time be unity on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. As Paul exhorted the Corinthians to unity, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak **the same thing**, and that there be **no divisions** among you; but that ye be **perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment**” (1 Corinthians 1:10, emph. LM). Anyone who claims to have unity where there is plurality is contradicting himself.

Unity demands a standard. If people are following different sets of rules, it is utterly impossible to “speak the same thing,” to have “no divisions,” and to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Years ago, the errand boys in a certain section of London had all picked up the habit of whistling out of tune as they went about their work. Some musicians heard their whistling and were wondering why this was, when they heard the chimes of the Westminster Quarters ringing out from the tower where Big Ben hung—and realized that they were equally out of tune with what the boys were whistling. The boys had heard the out of tune melody so often that it became the basis—the standard, if you will—for their own attempts at melody making.

The boys were in tune, or “speaking the same thing,” with each other. However, it would have been raucous cacophony had they attempted a whistling symphony with errand boys from another town. And regardless of how unified they may have been by themselves, they were speaking the **wrong** thing. They were going by a substandard standard.

One cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed when going by a substandard standard. Our standard must be the perfect standard—the inspired word of God. We are to give diligence to attain and maintain a specific unity—“*Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Ephesians 4:3). That is, we are to keep the unity the Spirit provides through the truth of the word He inspired (verses 4-6; Philippians 1:27).

Rather than seeking unity for unity’s sake, we must seek truth for the Lord’s sake (Psalm 25:5; Proverbs 23:23; Philippians 3:8). True unity is a **byproduct** of truth. If we seek unity for unity’s sake, we will never maintain truth. Unity for unity’s sake demands compromising truth. There are many “unstable souls” who are “*carried about with divers and strange doctrines*” (Hebrews 13:9). Unity with them would demand one of three things: (1) their forsaking error and coming to the truth, (2) our forsaking the truth altogether and standing where they stand, or (3) our compromising the truth and meeting in the middle. However, if we do this, we no longer have the truth, and thus are no longer free (John 8:32).

*Union* does not create *unity*. Unity pre-exists union. Paul warned the Thessalonians of the “man of sin” coming “*with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved*” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Why did Paul say these people perish? Because they “received not the love of” **unity**? No, most of the perishing people were very willing to go along with what others said. Uniting with error can only create a most unholy union. Jehoshaphat was one of the “good kings of Judah,” but he unwisely chose to form an alliance with Ahab, the wicked king of Israel. For this, the prophet Jehu rebuked him, “*Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD*” (2 Chronicles 19:2). The same could be said for churches and Christians who unite spiritually with manmade denominations and with false teachers and practitioners of error within the body of Christ.

Closely related to common misunderstandings of unity are misunderstandings regarding Biblical fellowship. Whereas *unity* refers to “oneness,” *fellowship* refers to “joint participation,” or a “close association involving mutual interests and sharing.”<sup>6</sup> In a spiritual context, this might refer to different

congregations working together to support a missionary, or different preachers speaking together on a lectureship. The key Biblical passage on fellowship is 1 John 1:3-7:

*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin* (1 John 1:3-7).

Note that spiritual fellowship can only exist between Christians who are also in spiritual fellowship with God. And no one can have fellowship with God or with Christians who does not “*walk in the light*.” One is “*delivered from the power of darkness*” when one is baptized into the kingdom of Christ; that is, His church (Colossians 1:13; compare with Acts 2:41-42, 47; John 3:5; 1 Corinthians 12:13). It is only then that one can walk in the light.

And one must continue to walk in the light, obeying God’s word (Psalm 119:105; 2 John 4; 3 John 4), abstaining from darkness (sin) in all its forms—sexual immorality, unscriptural worship, false doctrine, and every other way in which sin rears its ugly head. John proceeds to assure Christians that we can be restored to walking in the light and to spiritual fellowship if we confess our sins—implying also **repentance** of sins (1 John 3:3-10; 5:16-18; Proverbs 28:19).

But spiritual fellowship with those who do not walk in the light—those who have never been baptized into the kingdom of Christ, or those who remain unrepentant in sin—is prohibited. As Paul warns, “*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them*” (Ephesians 5:11).

Yet myriad brethren ignore this prohibition, having fellowship with false teachers and even with denominations. They allow false teachers to speak in their buildings, assuring those concerned, “He won’t teach his false doctrine **here**,” as though that somehow makes it acceptable. And many brethren become very defensive and agitated when the errors of a false teacher are pointed out, which agitation further indicates that they themselves are in darkness—“*And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov’d*” (John 3:19-20).

*continued from page three*

Some defend having spiritual fellowship with false teachers and non-Christians by saying, "The Bible says, 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful **works** of darkness,' not 'with the unfruitful **workers** of darkness.'" However, this is an artificial separation—how do you separate works from their workers? The Lord commands us to judge people **by** their works, just as He does (Matthew 7:16-20; Acts 10:34-35; 2 Corinthians 5:10). And other passages specify that Christians and churches are to separate from the doers of evil deeds as well as from the deeds themselves (Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6).

John would admonish in his Second Epistle, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds" (2 John 1:9-11). A person proclaiming a doctrine other than the doctrine of Christ—the doctrine Christ **gave**,<sup>7</sup> the New Testament—is not to be assisted or endorsed.

There is certainly room for difference of opinion on optional matters of judgment, such as whether to have the Lord's Supper before or after

the preaching, or which faithful mission works to support regularly. And there need be no severing of fellowship on academic matters, such as why Nicodemus came to Jesus by night, or what all was involved in Jephthah's vow. However, when it comes to obligatory matters such as the plan of salvation, the work of the church, the organization of the church, or the worship of the church, it is essential that we all "speak the same thing." It is only then that we can have Biblical unity and Biblical fellowship.

... To Be Continued

<sup>1</sup> Günther Harder, "stērizō, et al." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999 printing), 7:654.

<sup>2</sup> Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 172-173.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Bauckham, *Word Biblical Commentary—Jude, 2 Peter*, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1983), 267.

<sup>5</sup> B.C. Carr, "Daily Bible Reading," in 1959 *Lecture Outlines* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1959), 55.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer, et al., "koivōnia," pp. 552-553.

<sup>7</sup> Those seeking to loose Biblical definitions of fellowship claim that this is an *objective genitive*, which would mean "the doctrine **about** Christ." They subsequently claim that this prohibition of fellowship would only be against those who teach doctrines to the effect of "Christ never actually assumed a fleshly body." However, when one finds in Scripture "the doctrine of [someone or some group]," it is the doctrine that that person or group actually **teaches**—it is not the doctrine **about** them (cf. Matt. 16:12; Acts 2:42; 13:12; Rev. 2:15).

**GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION**

1. Hearing the word of God. (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

**THE CHURCH OF CHRIST**

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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