

A Commitment to Unity

It is true of every servant of the Lord Jesus that he/she wants to be an instrument of blessing in His hands. But the fulfilment of this desire nearly always depends on the unity of two hitherto divided and mutually antagonistic individuals or communities.

There was a long period of mutual enmity and war between Judah and Israel in the Old Testament. The wars only deepened the hostility and estrangement and this made the restoration of unity all the more difficult. It didn't happen until they were overrun by the Syrians and then the Babylonians to the destruction of both.

The same is true now! We do well to ask ourselves if one reason for our lack of greater progress and fruitfulness in our work is not our rigidity and lack of adjustment to others who are also servants of the Lord Jesus. I thank God that in the last 25 years various partnerships have grown up in North Africa, the Near East, the Arabian Peninsula and in various Central Asian countries. But there are always fresh controversies that bring division and discord. These are clearly a spiritual attack from our enemy. But why are we so easily deceived? Are we prepared to take the steps that are essential to the healing of such divisions? We are commanded to lay aside ill will, confessing our faults to one another and humbling ourselves in order that such breaches may be healed.

Our duty, as far as possible, of putting right any wrong done to another is given early and has a prominent place in the teaching of the Lord Jesus to His disciples. Perhaps this is because they were all from different backgrounds and their temperaments were very different.

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.” Mt. 5:23-24

This implies that the acceptance of ourselves. Our gifts and our ministry by the Lord Jesus is vitally affected by our relationships with our fellow workers. So perhaps our not infrequent barrenness both in our personal experience and in our service for the Lord Jesus may be due to a disregard of this command! We so easily lose sight of this truth and are hardened into rigid positions by the deceitfulness of sin. The result is that we are out of real fellowship with the Lord Jesus.

Sin of any kind grieves the Holy Spirit, but that form of it that causes us to become bitter against any other believers – especially co-workers – causes Him special pain. Conversely, love and unity among the Lord's people draws forth from Him a special degree of His blessings.

The really wonderful patience exercised by the Holy Spirit towards us as individuals should cause us to be patient towards one another. If the Holy Spirit, in spite of so much that is wrong and lacking in our ways, does not leave us, we should be very slow to conclude that we can't work with some other believers. Our sense of our own ignorance and proneness to sin should work in us a spirit of gentleness towards our fellow believers. Perhaps the advantages and opportunities in their lives have been much less than our own.

We might have expected that the Lord, who commanded Abraham to leave his native country with all its familiar and warm associations, would have seen that his companion ought to have been “a really nice fellow” (an English colloquialism meaning thoroughly likeable and helpful). But it didn't happen this way. The opposite was true! Lot had some measure of faith, but he was weak, selfish and unspiritual. So there was a great deal of strain and anxiety between Lot and Abraham. He was not a support Abraham, but rather a drain on him.

Yet this trial and discipline helped form Abraham's character and worked deep within him great spiritual and moral qualities that were essential to his being ***“the father of many nations”***. This ability wasn't acquired by an academic study of history or reproductive biology. His fitness for his

future role depended on his maintaining a right attitude to one person – Lot. This discipline was searching in its depth. The temptation to lose patience with Lot and put distance between them must have been great. He must have been tempted to be negative, cold and critical. He must have wanted to and threatened to terminate his connection with Lot.

But there was a magnanimous spirit in Abraham so that when separation became inevitable, he allowed Lot to choose the best land etc. Such a spirit of magnanimity fitted him for far-reaching usefulness. When Lot and his family were carried off by the hostile kings, Abraham did not, as he might have done, leave him to reap the results of his own sin and mistakes. But at the risk of his own personal danger and that of his men and household, he rescued Lot.

So let us not be surprised if, when we are earnestly seeking love and unity, the Lord permits us to be tried in some fierce ways that really hurt us by co-workers and others of the Lord's servants. This is not just a one-off event. Such trials go on and on. It is not a hurricane that passes quickly but one that appears to stay right on top of us for a very long time.

But if you fail to love one person, you get into a habit of failing to love others. It is so easy to say, "These people I have to work with are so trying I should get along nicely and grow in grace so much more and be more fruitful in the ministry if only so and so was not frustrating me!" But so-and-so is the greatest grace you have! Yes, it means suffering. But let us remember that "the taking of cities" to come depends on these things! It may mean being delivered to death! But our future usefulness depends on it!