

Spiritual Growth Lessons from Christian Ambassadors

Lesson 33

The Call To Unity In The Body Of Christ

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God's Master Plan for His Church has always been that of "unity", the Body of Christ becoming "one" and the world *seeing* it! Jesus' earnest prayer to His Heavenly Father before leaving this earth resonates with oneness in purpose and action.

John 17:21-23 (NIV) - "...Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

The yearning in Jesus' heart found expression in, "May they be brought to complete unity!" The King James translation expresses His longing this way, "That they be made perfect in one."

How well have we been doing these past two thousand years since Jesus prayed that prayer? How close have we come to being made perfect [mature] as one Body in Christ? Through all the ups and downs, it is safe to say that progress is being made. However, more could be done. One need only look at the vast number of churches in existence today, each competing for a following, to see that conflict still exists. The Body of Christ has a ways to go to fulfill God's Master plan of unity. In the following verses from Ephesians, Paul makes the strongest possible declaration for unity. If unity and oneness is to be accomplished, it must flow out from the oneness of God, the one and only true God.

Ephesians 4:1-6 (KJV) - "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

How does the flow of oneness from God get held up? Unfortunately, it gets held up anytime we allow our human nature, which is naturally negative, to blind us to the important work of the Holy Spirit. Paul explains in **Romans 8:6**, the typical thinking pattern of the carnal mind. The carnal mind is not interested in being one with the Spirit. On the contrary, it is in competition with the Spirit. That is why it sets out to oppose or go against the leading of the Spirit of God. There is quite a contrast between the thinking of the carnal mind and the thinking of the spiritual mind. While the carnal mind is controlled by death and hostility toward God and His purposes; the spiritual mind completely desires to be controlled by the life and peace flowing out from God.

People who think carnally are so busy looking for what is *wrong* in this person or that person, or what is wrong with this church or that church; they fail to see what is actually good and *right*. They are so intent on looking for the anti-Christ in everything; they fail to see Jesus, the Christ, the Son of the living God who is the rightful Head of the Body, *His Church*. People who think carnally not only fail to recognize the Spirit of Christ, they also fail to recognize the spirit of Christ dwelling in His messengers.

Jesus gives us a powerful example of the spiritual blindness that occurs when people (controlled by their carnality) fail to see God's Spirit at work.

Luke 7:29-35 (NIV) - (All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.)

[Jesus said] "To what, then, can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not cry.'

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners".' But wisdom is proved right by all her children."

In these few verses of scripture, Jesus clearly identified the typical thinking of the carnal mind. He compared the people of His generation to that of children playing in the village square. No matter what was suggested, they didn't want to do it. No matter what was offered they found fault with it. When people do not want to listen to the truth being presented, they will find an excuse not to listen. Jesus revealed how grown men and women can behave like spoiled children who refuse to respond, no matter *who* the spiritual revelation from God comes through.

The religious community in Jesus' generation, came against John the Baptist, accusing him of being too strict, possessing a demon, and living in lonely *isolation* in the wilderness. On the other hand, they accused Jesus of just the opposite. They accused Him of being too much of a *socialite*, because he mixed daily in ordinary life with ordinary people. He was even seen mixing with tax collectors and sinners.

Jesus was right, no matter *whom* the messenger was, the religious community would not be satisfied. Jesus responded to His critics by saying, "*But wisdom is proved right by all her children.*" What Jesus meant is that the ultimate verdict does not lie with the critics (those of carnal thinking). For those of carnal thinking are naturally focused on the flesh, therefore denying the workings of the power of God.

The Amplified translation brings the truth home.

Luke 7:35, Amplified Bible - *Yet wisdom is vindicated (shown to be true and divine) by all her children [by their life, character, and deeds].*

The bottom line: Though the religious critics [fault-finders] might criticize John the Baptist for his lonely isolation; *John had moved men's hearts to God, as they had not been moved in centuries.* Though the religious critics might criticize Jesus for being too much of a socialite, mixing too much in ordinary life with people like tax collectors and sinners; *in Jesus people were finding new life and a new access to God.* The lesson Jesus is teaching here can actually be summed up by one powerful statement:

"Always go the way of the Spirit!"

Jesus gave his disciples further instructions on why this is so important. One day John came to Jesus and said;

Luke 9:49-50 (KJV) - *"...Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us."*

Jesus was acknowledging to John and the other disciples a timeless lesson in unity. Jesus has followers, throughout all ages, who do not happen to belong to *our* particular group. For us to outright oppose them for not being *with us* comes down to our dogged determination to be right - even if it means entering into a power-play with Jesus Christ, Himself! Brothers and sisters we must avoid, at all costs, allowing our carnal minds to oppose the Spirit of the Living God. When we learn this lesson, we will be well on our way to being brought to complete unity in the Body of Christ.

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Questions for personal or group study:

1. If unity and oneness is to be accomplished in the Body of Christ, what source does Paul say this oneness must flow out or originate from? **See: Ephesians 4:4-6**
2. What mindset causes people to become blinded to the workings of the Holy Spirit? **See: Romans 8:5**
3. Describe the typical thinking pattern of the carnal mind and the spiritual mind. **See: Romans 8:5-7**
4. Why did Jesus compare the people of His generation to that of children playing in the village square? How would Jesus compare the people of our generation?
5. If we find ourselves opposing everyone God sends, what does this say about our life, character, and deeds? **See: Luke 7:35 Amplified Bible**
6. Why do we get into power struggles with Jesus?
7. What scripture passage did Jesus use to teach John and the other disciples a timeless lesson in unity?