

INTEGRITY is published each month and seeks to encourage all believers in Christ to strive to be one, to be pure, and to be honest and sincere in word and in deed, among themselves and toward all men.

Integrity

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Integrity

YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH US

Both this and the next issue will be devoted to the important subject of unity and fellowship. We have asked several members of our board to deal with various aspects of the topic, and the result is some very useful reading. We hope these issues will be something you will want to keep for future reference or give to your friends.

When Paul gave thanks for the Philippians—"for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now"—he obviously regarded their support of his ministry as a blessing to them as much as to him.

We feel the same way about your

support of this ministry. And that is why we have included in this issue an envelope for you to send in a token of your fellowship.

Because of the economic climate in which we live, our need for help seems to grow. We have always received our support in the form of relatively small contributions, which has the advantage of providing us with a much broader fellowship and more occasions for thanksgiving.

If you feel we are saying something worthy of support, you will know what to do with the attached self-addressed envelope. We only hope you will say (at least to yourself) either yes or no, and not just ignore us. Thanks, in advance.

Editorial: Taking Fellowship Seriously

Unity in Doctrine and Motive

David C. Steen

Grace and Unity

Joseph F. Jones

Attitudes and Unity

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TAKING FELLOWSHIP SERIOUSLY

It is likely that our discussions of fellowship in the church today deserve the criticism that they do not include enough references to the way that fellowship was expressed in the early church. Some people might be surprised to learn, for instance, that the act of calling on someone to lead a prayer in the assembly is never viewed as equivalent to having fellowship with him. The indications are that fellowship to them was a bit more serious than that.

When Paul laid out the Romans the necessity of "contributing to the needs of the saints," he used the standard Biblical word for fellowship, which shows up in several similar passages. It is used of the Macedonians, who "begged with much entreaty for the favor of participating in the support of the saints." Paul anticipated that the Corinthians would merit commendation "for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all." The sharing of the Jerusalem church is well known, for they "Had all things common."

These people took their fellowship so seriously that they went against the odds in expressing it. Why else would the Macedonians rise up in the midst of their deep poverty to share the burdens of saints in Judea whom they had never met and from whom they could not reasonably expect thanks?

Those Macedonians were also commended for their participation in the gospel. They were so bound up in the work and needs of others that they could not refrain from bearing part of the expenses. They expressed this aspect of their fellowship by supporting Paul in his missionary activity.

The Lord's supper is called a "sharing" (or participation, or communion, or fellowship) in the blood and body of Christ, and is often referred to by scholars as the "fellowship meal" of the early church. But does that term make sense to us, in view of the way we live in the body? The church at Corinth fell under severe criticism for failing to discern the body when they ate the Lord's supper, for failing (we might say) to take the question of fellowship seriously enough. Let us beware lest we make the same mistake.

—HGL

Unity in Doctrine and Motive

DAVID C. STEEN
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The New Testament makes it clear that right doctrine is a necessary underpinning for the unity of Christians. When the warnings about deceivers, false teachers, different gospels, antichrists, enemies of the cross, divisive persons and heresies are reviewed, they seem to come from every direction. Peter (2 Pet. 2:1-22), John (2 John 7-11), Paul (Rom. 16:17-20; Gal. 1:6-9; Phil. 3:17-21), and even Jesus (Matt. 7:15ff.) all had strong language to apply to those who would tempt the disciples of Christ away from the "one body and one Spirit . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all" with a different doctrine or gospel.

We do well, then, when we attempt to maintain the standard of faith in the churches. It is appropriate to keep a sensitive ear so that the sheep who do not quite sound like sheep (though they try hard and almost bring it off) may be uncovered as the ferocious wolves they really are. The results otherwise are that groups of people, whose souls and relationships are so important that Christ died for them, are riddled with confusion and division, pain and broken trust. Ministries are stymied, friends are left embracing empty air, children are bewildered, stomachs churn and tears fall.

Two Distinctions

In carrying through this sensitive and weighty task, though, mature Christians should maintain two distinctions reflected in the Scriptures. One concerns the difference between what may and may not be

contained in "sound doctrine" or "the gospel you received" or "the teaching of Christ." These seem to be looser terms in contemporary parlance than they were when the New Testament writers used them. The second distinction is between one's doctrine and one's motives. A person may hold right or wrong doctrine along with either appropriate or inappropriate attitudes and motives. These nuances are subtle, but their clarification may be helpful as we seek to embody the oneness for which our Lord prayed and died.

The New Testament contains several passages that address problems of false doctrine in the churches. Messages from Paul and John will come under our scrutiny for this writing. Both had deep love for the churches and abiding allegiance to the Lord. Both recognized that the crucial bonds keeping the fellowship tied together were woven from such allegiance. If teachers denied some fundamental aspect of who Jesus was or what God accomplished through Jesus, their work threatened to unravel those ties. So our earliest forbears in church leadership, staunch defenders of the faith, opposed the false teaching with every ounce of their being.

One of the sharpest warnings concerning false doctrine is found in the first chapter of Galatians. There Paul addressed the problem of the Judaizers. They had begun teaching observance of the Jewish Law — particularly circumcision — as a prerequisite to discipleship to Christ. According to Paul, their teaching was a

perversion of the gospel. Though it appeared to be only a different gospel, it was really **not** the good news of the grace of Christ at all! And anyone who preached it faced condemnation.

Paul's phrase — "a gospel other than what you accepted" (vs. 9, NIV) — is important for our consideration. He had already described this message as "a gospel other than the one we preached to you" in vs. 8. The content of this particular gospel which Paul had preached was crucial. Any changes were out of the question. Our curiosity is aroused. What was the content of Paul's presentation of the gracious message?

Elements

One of its elements rings clearly throughout Galatians. It was the redeeming death of Christ (2:21; 3:13; 4:5; 5:1). The bare-faced preaching of the cross was an offense to the Jews (5:11) because it rejected all the human merit they thought they gained by keeping the law (Ridderbos, *Galatians*, NICNT, 1953, p.194). The false teachers in Galatia were bowing to Jewish threats of persecution because of this offense (6:12; cf. also Acts 13:45,50; 14:2,5,19). They boasted in keeping the law. Paul would only boast in the efficacy of the cross (6:13f.).

The remaining elements of the gospel message of Paul were named in 1 Corinthians 15:1-8. After "Christ died for our sins," he also was buried, was raised on the third day according to Scripture and appeared to certain individuals and groups. That is what Paul went about preaching as the gospel. That constituted the Good News which the whole world needed to receive. That is what Paul referred to in Galatians 1 when he condemned those who would preach a different gospel.

We should probably be instructed by this to rethink our use of language concerning "perversion of the gospel." Teaching that falls in this category is that which undermines the essence or the direct ramifications of these basic tenets of the apostolic message. Such teaching needs to be avoided along with its proponents. On the other hand, teachers who uphold this gospel which Paul outlines so simply, but who may disagree with us on matters farther from the core of Christian existence, should not be referred to in any sense as "gospel perverters." They do not threaten the basic unity of the church because that resides in common faith in this gospel.

In 2 John the author used the terms "deceiver" and "antichrist" to describe anyone who "does not abide in the doctrine of Christ" (vss. 7-9, NKJV). That person had no real relationship with God even though he or she may have claimed differently. These were radical claims. They underscored the importance of being totally loyal to the "doctrine of Christ." It was the basis of the church's fellowship. The author warned his beloved readers against offering even hospitality to one of the "deceivers," so as not to share in such wicked work (vss. 10f.).

In order to avoid reading contemporary meaning back into ancient language it is crucial that we understand clearly the substance to which the elder of 2 John referred when he used the phrase "doctrine (or teaching, *didache*) of Christ." We usually think in terms of the sum of all the teaching we have ever received with regard to the Lord and the church when we use the word "doctrine." All the sermon points and Sunday School classes of our lives, sort of rolled up together, form an aggregate that we think of as doctrine.

Then, as we plug that understanding of the term into its socket in 2 John, we are

exhorted to hold tenaciously to every point of theology and ethics we ever heard or learned, or face the fearful consequence of exclusion. Many Christians have been faced with such understanding on the part of church leaders. They have been forced out of fellowship or at least to the outer perimeters of communion because of some peculiarity of thought or practice. This has been done in the name of Scripture with oblique reference to 2 John 9-11 as justification.

Narrow Definition

This is a most unfortunate result of anachronism and faulty interpretation. Taken in the context of the letter, the phrase "doctrine of Christ" is clearly defined in very simple terms. Verse 7 states the particular problem being faced by that early Christian community. The deceptive teaching was the denial of any real incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Obviously, this departure from the "teaching of Christ" reduced the very underpinnings of the "one faith" to nothing. If God was not in Christ — if Jesus was not who he claimed to be — then the value of whatever he said or did as Savior is made nil. 2 John pointed out in strongest terms that such teaching went beyond the bounds of truth. It was to be shunned.

It should be clear, though, that this gives a very narrow (if deep) definition of doctrine which excludes much of what we have traditionally included. I.H. Marshall notes this well.

There could be no stronger condemnation of error and deceit in the realm of Christian doctrine. But it should be noted that the elder's attack is on those who strike at the heart of Christian belief, not at those who may have happened to differ from him on theological points of lesser importance. When, however, the central

citadel of the faith is under attack, there is need for clear speaking (*Epistles of John*, NICNT, 1978, pp. 71-72).

For the benefit of the unity and fellowship of our churches, we would probably do well to reevaluate the use of 2 John 9-11 to justify castigating sisters and brothers in Christ with whom we disagree theologically. Most are not in any manner questioning or threatening this basic tenet of the church's faith, and they should not be treated as if they were.

Moving back into Pauline material, we find the same word for "doctrine" (*didache*) in Romans 16:17. There Paul warned Christians to watch out for those whose action would bring discord and provide enticement to sin. What they did was "contrary to the doctrine" which had first been taught the Christians.

It is difficult to say with surety who or precisely what activities and teachings Paul had in mind. This paragraph (vss. 17-20) was set in the context of a long list of greetings closing the letter. It was separated from the body of Romans as if it were an afterthought or a response to a late breaking news flash from Rome. (Some scholars argue that ch. 16 was addressed originally to Ephesus, but I prefer to avoid that issue here and deal with the text as it stands.) Nevertheless, it seems possible to find in Romans a certain core of "teaching" that was accepted commonly among the Christians. Ernest Best (*Romans*, Cambridge Bible Commentary, 1967, p.176) says that in vs. 17 Paul did not refer to specifics he had been teaching in his letter, "but to the common fund of Christian instruction on which we have seen him draw several times (1:3-4; 4:24-25; 6:3,17; 10:9-10; 12:9-21; cf. 15:14)." You will note that these passages all dealt with the death and/or resurrection of Jesus or ramifications of these for Christian life. The content of "false

teachings" to which Paul alerted the church, then, would have been some denial of these foundations of belief in Christ.

This is confirmed as we read further in the paragraph about the attitudes and motivations of these people. The content of what they said was inherently divisive because it pulled the rug out from under faith in Christ. Paul went on to say these people were servants of their own desires rather than Christ. They were out to get their way at all costs, in other words. Further, their purpose in smooth talk and flattery was to deceive naive people. These false teachers were folks who, from the outset of their relationships with Christian groups, were dishonest self-seekers with little or no regard for the unity of the church in Christ.

Danger to the Church

The danger to the church of such deceitful teachers is apparent. Today, as well as long ago, people who do not accept the teachings of the death and resurrection of Christ can do great destruction to the close-knit fabric of the church's oneness. Great care is warranted to see that such persons not be given the lead in congregations.

For the present day, though, the greater danger may lie in a misuse of this passage. To make the accusation that someone fits the description given here by Paul because he or she disagrees with some dear, but less central, point of theology or church practice is to abuse Paul's intention altogether. As in the two earlier passages, so in this one, fairly wide latitude may be inferred as given in Christian faith and practice, as long as it is Christian. That is, as long as it holds to the basic doctrine, teaching or gospel of Jesus Christ.

We conclude that we must tighten our distinctions as to true and false doctrine.

We are well instructed to limit ourselves to New Testament understandings of these problems rather than reading contemporary understandings back into ancient phrases. The second kind of distinction we need to maintain has been foreshadowed in the use of Romans 16:17-18. It concerns the difference between the content of one's teaching and one's attitude or motivation behind sharing it among Christians.

We already have seen the example of false teachers whose motivation was intended to cause division from the outset. Unfortunately, these people could trace their roots to very ancient days. Proverbs 6:12-15 shows that the "scoundrel and villain, who goes about with a corrupt mouth . . . who plots evil with deceit in his heart — (and) always stirs up dissension" was well known before Paul's day. The very next proverb (6:16-19) indicates not only the methods such people used, but also the Lord's longstanding hatred of them.

Various New Testament passages clearly show that many of the false teachers worked out of evil motives. In Phillipians 3:17-21, they were not only enemies of the cross of Christ (proponents of false doctrine), but also gloried in their shame. They served their own bellies as gods. Their minds were set on earthly things. In 2 Peter 2 the list of evil motives and attitudes is too long to enumerate fully. There the false teachers were "denying the sovereign Lord" (vs. 1, NIV). But they were also sneaky, greedy, dishonest, arrogant, seductive "slaves of depravity." These people's lives were so messed up by the world that they had totally turned away from Christ and were "worse off at the end than they were at the beginning" (vs. 20). The listing could go on, but the gruesome point is made. As dangerous and threatening as the content of false doctrine was to the unity of the

church, people's evil motives and attitudes were equally or more threatening.

In fact, this was true even when people were right about certain issues. In Romans 14, for instance, Paul granted that no food was unclean in itself. The strong Christians were right on that point. Still he called for them to act out of loving and peaceful motives for mutual edification rather than seeking to have their own way all the time. The unity of the church is threatened when one of the Christians is offering a stumbling-block to another out of a selfish attitude.

On the other hand, the example of Apollos in Acts 18 seems to show that one's doctrine or practice of faith might be insufficient and yet accompanied by a healthy, open-minded attitude toward truth. Apollos was going about teaching when the only baptism he knew was that of John (vs. 25). Baptism as a kind of participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ was not a part of his theology or practice. Yet, when this very important insufficiency was graciously explained by Priscilla and Aquila, Apollos evidently accepted it readily. He went on to become a great help to the believers in Achaia. Apollos was not serving his own interests, but those of his Lord and the Lord's church.

Doctrine and Motives

We recognize the distinction between doctrine and motives. This difference is behind Paul's statement in Galatians 5: "in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself in love." The same distinction stands behind the elder's repetition of the deep need for a loving attitude among Christians when he wrote 2 John. Where this attitude prevails, even wrong or insufficient doctrine can be

corrected and the unity of the church, its gift from God, can remain unscathed.

All too often we find sisters and brothers in Christ blurring this distinction. We do that when we zero in on someone whose theology is different from our own on some point precious to us. It is someone who teaches or preaches his or her view on the issue. We come to the conclusion that this is a teacher of false doctrine (an often ill-founded conclusion as we have seen). Then we make the quantum leap of falsely imputing deceptive motives to our brother or sister and then smearing his or her name and work wherever we can. Whole churches are confused and divided. But off we go looking for another target.

Or we find someone who agrees with all of our theology and offer acceptance, ignoring the fact that he or she may be abusing others over these views. Motivated by pride or greed or jealousy or some other worldly attitude, trying to build name recognition or "put the church on the map," our friend may be killing a congregation. But if he or she agrees with us, we find a way to ignore that.

As important as right doctrine is for the church's unity, healthy and loving attitudes are also essential. We must understand and apply the biblical distinctions between true and false doctrine. They hinge on the person and work of Jesus Christ. But we must also seek to understand one another's motives. We cannot countenance the divisive brother or sister, no matter what his or her "positions" are. We cannot slander others just because we disagree theologically with them. The unity our Lord has provided is far too precious. Sensitivity to these issues may help keep us from losing this priceless gift. "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, will be with us in truth and love" (2 John 2).

Grace and Unity

JOSEPH F. JONES

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The Ephesian letter speaks such contemporary language that did we not know its ancient setting it could easily be proclaimed as of recent origin. For the writer speaks of hostility as a "dividing wall" between persons and nations; he talks about reconciliation between individuals, as though a marital conflict were at stake; and further, he discusses "bringing the hostility to an end," as though two warring camps had laid down their arms. Our age, like the days of Paul, witnesses to endless human conflict, open and repressed hostility, human hatred flowering into war — both in society and in the church.

But in sharp contrast to the hostility and conflict which characterize human relationships, the message of the gospel is that God through the blood of Jesus has brought reconciliation and peace. In his day the apostle Paul saw the human predicament in terms of Jew and Gentile alienated one from the other; slave and free were pitted in clandestine if not open battle; and the bitter clash between the sexes was in full force, with dominant males lording it over subdued females. Mankind was so sharply divided among itself, with Satan employing "the flesh" as his means of keeping the creatures of God in hostile relations, that only a miracle could possibly break down the walls of division — and that is precisely what God in Christ did. "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God . . . you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:26,28).

The ultimate root of such human divisiveness is man's aliveness to sin. He has not died either to sin within his inner being or to Satan's external grip. Man still walked in his trespasses and sins, and

Satan used his evil impulses and desires to further the reign of darkness. And within this reign of darkness men perpetrated all kinds of behavior alien to the mind and will of God. The vivid picture of man alienated from God, given over to "a base mind and to improper conduct," is painted in Romans 1 (see particularly Rom. 1:28-32). In such a predicament, what hope could there possibly be for individuals and nations?

"Out of the Great Love"

While painfully aware of man's plight and his inability to help himself, the called messenger of Christ heralded the Good News. "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Eph. 2:4-8a)

It is this divine love and mercy that has come in the cross of Jesus to those who were, in Paul's language, "separated . . . alienated . . . strangers . . . having no hope and without God in the world." It is now through the undeserved life and death of Jesus that God has effected peace, has fashioned reconciliation both between man and God, and man and man. "For he is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility . . ." (Eph. 2:14). It was his divine will and work which created in "himself one new man in place

of the two, so making peace." The impossible has become reality, the unbelievable is now become credible, for God has reconciled to himself and to one another all his warring creatures into one body through the blood of the cross, "thereby bringing the hostility to an end" (Eph. 2:16).

Now reconciled one to another in His body, the church of Jesus the risen Lord, believers have "access in one Spirit to the Father." What an inspired picture of unity and fellowship in the Body of Christ! Fashioned together, not through man's achievement but by the grace of God in the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, those so reconciled should, the apostle understandably insists, be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). And this is the basis and nature of that unity for which Jesus prayed and died (John 17:20-26).

Essence of Christian Unity

1. Christian unity is **divinely initiated** and **effected**. No amount of human wisdom and planning, no accumulation of human achievement could accomplish such an impossible task as that envisioned by the apostle. Mankind was (is) incapable of doing for himself what must be done, for he is "dead in sin." His life style — attitudes and actions — are motivated and controlled by the "prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience." Men and women are characterized by the apostle as "by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind." Their predicament is poignantly summed up as being "without hope and without God in the world." No amount of Jewish or Gentile ecclesiastical structuring can liberate or save them. God will have to act, and that he did in the cross of Jesus. So the cross becomes, ironically enough in this theological picture, not the

instrument of Jesus' defeat, but the means of his victory in effecting the purposes of God.

Christian unity roots then in the **redemptive work of God**. We are one in Christ because of what has happened to us through the blood of Jesus. The church does not set the standards or criteria by which we determine unity and fellowship. Baptized into Christ we are one — whether we cherish the idea or not. When leaders of congregations presume to themselves the authority of standard-setting, declaring whom they will accept or reject, they have arrogated to themselves the role of God. Yet we read and hear this daily in religious journals, letters of fellowship (rather, of disfellowship), and sermons castigating other brethren simply because we have honest differences in intellectual understanding. Unity (oneness) in Christ does not come from intellectual conformity in every interpretation of Scripture, nor is it a uniformity of view and practice produced by the fear of ostracism and the threat of "being disfellowshipped."

2. The unity effected by divine grace is the result of **God's unconditional love** which can **accept without necessarily approving or agreeing**. The Good News is that God **loves and accepts**. Knowing God the Father's ability to love and accept, without necessarily approving or requiring perfection of his children, the apostle can call upon believers in the body to do likewise. So even when brethren had deep differences, sharp cleavages and varying points of view, the apostle called upon them to accept (welcome, receive) one another, even as they had been received by God. "May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:5-7).

This has to be bitter divine advice for a brotherhood nurtured on the concept of unity as absolute conformity to a list of doctrinal interpretations, requiring intellectual assent, allowing no differences or variances, regardless of how sincere the view, or how Biblically grounded the interpreter, or how lovingly the view may be held or presented. Let the reader look for a moment at a very abbreviated list of Biblical ideas and/or practices: the nature and work of the Holy Spirit; spiritual gifts; the role of women in the church; the nature of freedom in Christ; the washing of feet and the "holy kiss"; care of orphans and the degree of cooperation of churches in benevolent outreaches; and continue with the millennium, the "war question," the marriage, divorce, and remarriage question, the "church treasury," and ad infinitum! Now let the reader look for that congregation where all the members — including the elders and preacher — agree exactly on the "correct interpretation" regarding each of the above. Yet this is precisely the approach which has been foisted upon the church, and upon which the lines of unity and fellowship are being so grievously drawn. It hardly sounds like the apostle who, writing to brethren with radically differing views on "important matters," encouraged them to "welcome one another . . . as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

3. The unity effected by God's grace removes hostility, reconciles warring factions, and fashions believers into men and women of kindness. Since all have sinned and been saved through the undeserved grace of God in Christ, we are a community of saints. Having experienced the loving forgiveness and acceptance of

the Lord, we are no longer hostile to God or one another. Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, male and female — with all the cultural and sociological differences which these contrasting pairs imply — are declared to be one in Christ (Gal. 3:28). With Jesus as the center of the saved community (church), we all with common faith and love look to him; we are at peace with him and with one another. How can a brotherhood continue to encourage open hostility in the name of sound doctrine, to abuse and mistreat fellow Christians under the misnomer of true fellowship, when the blood of Jesus is supposed to bring peace, remove hostility, and create kindness one toward another?

4. The unity produced through the grace of God makes "us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2:5). The church is a community of spiritually alive individuals, in whom God's Spirit has come to reside (Eph. 2:22). With his Spirit saturating the life of the Christian community there is "righteousness and peace and joy" (Rom. 14:17). Worship is an exhilarating experience of exalting the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren can truthfully proclaim, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). Both in worship and life the saved and unified community can "with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 14:6). And by this oneness all men will come to know both the Father and the Son (John 17:20-23).

When churches of Christ today speak of Restoration, might we more rightly begin with the restoration of that oneness (unity) which roots in the grace of God? For we are all one through that redemptive grace of God manifested in Jesus, crucified but raised, living as Lord in the life of his church. "To God be the glory, great things he has done."

Attitudes and Unity

HOY LEDBETTER

If you tie two cats together by their tails and hang them over a clothesline, you will achieve union, but not unity. I learned that as a youngster, and I believed it to the extent that I understood it. Such a procedure is not only detrimental to the cats, but it is simply not the way to arrive at harmony in the universe. Nor is it — and that was the point of my early teachers — the kind of togetherness we are supposed to have in the church. However, it is the kind we have been getting . . . which was not quite what my teachers intended to say.

From a babe I have known the sacred writings regarding unity, and one of our favorite texts has been 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment" (NASV). But I have not always seen the point of this passage, since I failed to appreciate the problem it was written to correct.

As the context indicates, four distinct parties had arisen at Corinth, claiming the names of Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ. I will not speculate on the peculiarities of each of these, but I hope it is clear that the Christ party was no better than the others, since it was using the name of Christ in a sectarian way. There is, of course, a need to focus on Christ, as opposed to others, but not on a Christ who can be, in Paul's words, "apportioned out," as if to justify the tacit claim, "Christ is mine, and not yours."

The problem at Corinth was not one of doctrine, but of attitude. Their apartheid was not due to defective dogma, but to chronic contentions. Each Christian had his own slogan ("I am of Paul, I of Apollos, I of Cephas, and I of Christ"), and there was no moral difference between them. It was a situation in which nobody was right.

So Paul required of them that there should be no divisions, and he asked "that you all agree." This is another way of saying that they should make up their differences. The original expression (literally "all speak the same thing") is commonly used of hostile parties reaching agreement, but in this text it need not mean anything more specific than that the Corinthians should get along with each other. Paul was trying to get them to get rid of their party slogans and regain unity.

Something was missing among the sectarian Corinthians, and, as Paul put it, they needed to "be made complete." The Greek word he employed is sometimes used in medical contexts in the sense of mending fractures in the human body — a fitting figure for the healing of separations in the body of Christ. The word is also used in the gospels of the mending and readying of nets by fishermen, which suggests that the divided church is defective and needs to be restored to its rightful condition.

This restoration, this being made complete is to be done in the "same mind and in the same judgment." The precise meaning of these terms, in Greek as well as in English, is very difficult to determine, as an examination of the com-

mentaries and lexica will show, but the general meaning is clear enough. Perhaps the best rendering is "the same attitude and the same purpose." They needed to have the family spirit and to be moving in the same direction.

Sectarian Abuse

Unfortunately, this passage has been used to require the very thing Paul condemned, and we should take note of its abuse by sectarians. The apostle's plea that the Corinthians "speak the same thing" (the literal version) has been used to enforce the view that the Bible permits no diversity, not even in very minor points of doctrine. His reference to "the same attitude and the same purpose" (or, if you prefer, "the same mind and the same judgment") has carried the same schismatic burden. But the emphatic repetition of "same" notwithstanding, this approach does violence to the context, in which Paul is simply trying to get the Corinthians to abandon their party slogans — "to drop these party-cries," as Moffatt puts it.

What sectarians try to bind by this passage is not only declared to be impossible by a correct exegesis, but that is also the verdict of history, for none of us has ever known a situation in which all literally speak the same thing and have precisely the same viewpoint. When such uniformity becomes the objective of the majority, diversity will be outlawed and the minority will be required to at least say they believe exactly what everyone else does. Which reminds us of the cats on the clothesline.

Paul urged Titus to "reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned" (Tit. 3:10). The "factious man" in this passage

is a "heretic" in the New Testament sense of the term. We use the word "heretic" today to indicate one who holds a false doctrine, and it came to have that meaning in the second century, but at the time Paul wrote Titus it rather denoted one who promoted dissension by his factious manner. It would be hard to improve on William Barclay's definition: "A heretic is simply a man who has decided that he is right and everybody else is wrong."

The man to whom Paul refers falls under condemnation, not for what he believes, but for the way he holds his belief: he persists in dividing the church's unity by insisting that everyone has to conform to his viewpoints. What Paul had to combat at Crete was simply the inclination of the errorists to form dissident groups.

This passage, like 1 Corinthians 1:10, has been used to support the very sin it opposes. The factious man, who may be quite orthodox in doctrine, forces others to profess his opinions. Since he cannot afford to ignore that scripture, he will confuse factiousness with want of faith and will seek to justify his schismatic manner by claiming that the text demands conformity. His unity is that of the cats on the clothesline.

In John's second and third epistles we encounter two kinds of people who threaten the unity of the church. Both make undue claims, the one of intellectual progress, the other to personal authority. One "goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ" (2 Jn. 9); since he cannot make the fundamental Christian confession, he is not to be received or greeted by the saints. The other, who is equally destructive, is exemplified by Diotrephes, whose authoritarianism is countered by John in unequivocal terms: "I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among

them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church" (3 Jn. 9-10).

The Charges

Although there is no hint that John had any doctrinal problems with his adversary, it is not incredible that Diotrephes concocted some such excuse for his behavior. Still, his error was moral rather than doctrinal. John entered a four-count indictment against him:

(1) He had a love of first place, an attitude which is diametrically opposed to the teaching of Jesus. We cannot be sure how this worked out in day-to-day relationships within the congregation, but it is quite likely that he reserved for himself the right of final approval in all decisions made by the church. Those who "love to be first among them" usually find a way to keep the brethren from doing anything they do not want to do. Diotrephes belonged to that class of people whose ambition will be stopped by nothing, not even conflict with the very apostle of Jesus.

But perhaps Diotrephes was not the only one to be blamed for his attitude. His name, which means Zeus-reared, may suggest that he belonged to Greek aristocracy and had grown accustomed to other people showing deference to him. It is all too often the case that in the church we give special place to "those who seem to be somewhat," and judge them by worldly rather than by Christian standards. Thus we actually encourage a sinful attitude which has been one of the chief causes of dissension in the church and of grief in heaven.

(2) Diotrephes refused to receive John and his associates. Ambitious people can be very uncooperative. They may refuse to work with the most virtuous of brethren and can find little enthusiasm for projects which do not serve their own purposes. But this attitude could not stand by itself, so:

(3) He resorted to slanderous attacks against the apostle. The original language indicates that his charges were not only wicked but empty. It is a common practice of the authoritarian personality to lay baseless charges against the opposition. The charges may issue from a dirt-hunting disposition which either finds or invents what it seeks. The moral perspective of people like Diotrephes is perverted; it is easy for them to ascribe wrong to those who resist their purposes. Unless their conscience is totally seared, psychological closure will require them to assume that their opponents are moral derelicts and to put them in the worst possible light.

(4) Diotrephes abused the power of excommunication, his ultimate weapon. He not only refused to receive the brethren, but forbade those who wished to do so, and cast them out of the church. It is possible that casting out of the church may indicate some kind of mob action, or that he hounded them until they just had to leave (a modern practice), but the weight of probability favors excommunication (commonly called disfellowshipping). It is evident that Diotrephes had acquired the power to exclude his enemies, and also to classify as enemies those who made the mistake of not shunning the people he shunned.

The danger of Diotrephes and his kind of church leader is that they do not come across as loving first place, and therefore do not immediately incur the suspicion of their fellow Christians. They will claim to have only the best interests of the church

at heart, and may be very hard workers. They often gain the support of the majority, as Diotrephes seems to have done, for the church has never had the best eyesight when it comes to detecting the evil of authoritarianism. That is why people like Diotrephes can flourish in the face of Christ's stern warning against them.

Domineering Spirit

It would not be unfair to say that Diotrephes was guilty of "lording it over" the church, a common sin which was disallowed by Peter and disclaimed by Paul. Peter laid down this requirement of elders: "nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock" (1 Pet. 5:3). This stipulation seems even stronger when read in its context, which stresses submission and mutual humility. The very point of Christian leadership is defeated by the domineering spirit.

To "lord it over" means "to be master, to rule, to control." The frequency with which this directive is violated in the church today does not speak very well of our respect for the Scriptures. It is interesting — but certainly not pleasant — to see our preachers and elders wrestle with (and sometimes wrest) Peter's prohibition as they try to interpret "lording it over" in such a way that elders are still allowed to lord it over the flock. Loving to rule and control as we do, we simply refuse to come to grips with the full meaning of the passage.

Paul enters the discussion in 2 Corinthians 1:24: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm." He had said in the previous verse that the reason he had not come to Corinth was "to spare you," and he knew that the power to spare implies the power to

punish, so he quickly disclaimed any mastery over them.

Someone has paraphrased Paul's statement this way: "We do not force a creed upon you, but we help you in your quest for one." Nevertheless the history of the church has ever been marred by those who do force a creed upon others. Those who would be tyrants rather than ministers evidence a certain presumptuousness. Have you ever heard an elder say, "That book (magazine, etc.) should be banned because I might read it and be corrupted by it"? No, we try to take away the freedom of others, not our own.

Years ago James Denney said, "A clerical hierarchy . . . does lord it over faith; it legislates for the laity, both in faith and practice, without their co-operation, or even their consent; it keeps . . . the mass of believing men, which is the Church, in a perpetual minority. . . . It is the confiscation of Christian freedom; the keeping of believers in leading-strings all their days, lest in their liberty they should go astray." One Lord, and only one, has lordship over the faith of the Christian, and we had better remember that.

One reason hierarchical despotism will never work is that (as someone has said) no man can unsee what he has seen. We know what we know, and no amount of force can change that. Christian faith issues from proclamation, not domination. Those who believe they must, for the sake of unity, "dictate the terms of our faith" (2 Cor. 1:24, NEB) are completely out of phase with Biblical thinking. They stir up trouble like one who ties cats' tails together.

An outstanding statement on Christian ministry which has a significant bearing on unity is that of Paul in 2 Timothy 2:23-25: "But refuse ignorant and foolish speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. And the Lord's bond-servant

must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition . . ." God's people should "have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies" (RSV), and (we could say for) they "must not be quarrelsome." Then what must they be? The apostle lists some essential characteristics of the faithful minister:

(1) He is kind to all. Paul elsewhere applies the Greek word to the gentleness of the nursing mother who tenderly cares for her children, which was his attitude among the Thessalonians. It denotes a mildness which rules out insensitive sarcasm, intolerance, aloofness, disrespect for others, and hostile posturing. One who has lost the art of being kind is detrimental to the fellowship of the church because people are afraid of him and therefore stand apart from him.

(2) He is able to teach. When controversy threatens to set Christians in opposition to each other, an apt teacher, who can devote himself to positive instruction rather than criticizing and arguing, is an evangelistic jewel. His approach is effective as well as right, for knowledge is more than equal to force as a vehicle for maintaining the unity which the Spirit inspires.

(3) He is patient when wronged. Being "ready to put up with evil without resentment," he will not become angry or retaliate when he suffers, as he must, insult and injury, for love, as the Bible says, "is not touchy." The faults and follies of others, and their consequences to him, will never divert his attention from his model, Jesus, who did not repay reviling with reviling. His soft and cool answers will neutralize the damage done by heated arguments and radical statements and will strengthen the unity of the saints.

(4) He corrects his opponents with gentleness. It is impossible to find one English equivalent to the Greek word for "gentleness." Other renderings include "humility, courtesy, considerateness, meekness" (Arndt-Gingrich). In the Lord's servant there must be a happy combination of toughness and softness. Never brash, haughty or rude, he will win over rather than antagonize his opponents. The correction here envisaged is an educational process in which those who have departed from the gospel are brought back by reason and persuasion. The average church-goer, I suspect, fully sympathizes with the poet: "Oh, I long for the glow of a kindly heart and the grasp of a friendly hand!" He may be won by the warmth of love, but he will not be battered into submission by magisterial harshness and severity.

When he took over the leadership of the German armed forces just before Christmas, 1941, Adolph Hitler claimed, "After fifteen years of work I have achieved, as a common German soldier and merely with my fanatical will power, the unity of the German nation." But sensible people want no part of his apparent unity, and they know that fellowship must be without coercion or deception. While attitudes like that of Hitler may at times have an appeal, surely we know that they are never right.

Compare him with one who never threatened when he suffered; would not quarrel nor cry out; would not break off a battered reed or put out a smoldering wick; would not retaliate but turned the other cheek; was meek and lowly in heart; and whose meekness and gentleness was such that it became the basis of Christian exhortation. He is the one who must determine our attitudes. If it is anyone else, we are not Christians.