

# Beauty and Bonds

by Dick Brogden

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a generous heart, modeling life on the Good Shepherd, and prioritizing love and truth over unity and grace.*

**Scripture:** Zechariah 11:7, Zechariah 11:16, Acts 10:2, Acts 11:23

**Topics:** "Generous Heart", "Christian Leadership"

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## Description

Dick Brogden emphasizes the importance of having a generous heart that God blesses, contrasting it with a stingy heart that restricts ministry and seeks to minimize influence. He highlights Barnabas as an example of a generous heart and Diotrephes as an example of a stingy shepherd. The wise, generous shepherd cares for all, seeks the young, heals the broken, feeds the strong, and models his life after the Good Shepherd. Brogden stresses that grace and unity are not just goals but tools to be used in service of God's love and glory, warning against valuing them over the person of Jesus, as seen in the example of John the beloved.

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## Transcript

Generosity of heart is a prayer that God answers (Acts 10:2, 4). A gracious heart takes the greatest joy when others walk and grow in the truth (3 John 4). A stingy heart restricts the ministry of others and seeks to minimize their influence. Barnabas is a classic example of the generous heart God blesses (Acts 11:23), while Diotrephes "who loves to have the preeminence" is an example of a stingy shepherd (3 John 9). Zechariah reveals what qualities make up the wise, generous shepherd: He cares for the cut off, he seeks the young, he heals the broken, he feeds those that are strong, he does not attack his own, and he does not abandon the flock (Zech. 11:16-17). The wise shepherd models his life on the great Good Shepherd, who carries two staves: Beauty and Bonds (v. 7). The Masoretic text uses the word "grace" for "beauty" and "unity" for "bonds." The wise shepherd feeds his flock using grace and unity. We usually think of grace as something bestowed and then displayed on the wall of our hearts rather than something we feed on as fuel. Grace is what we spiritually eat to survive. To receive grace is to ingest and be energized by it, not to display it on some interior wall. Grace has to get into our blood stream, into our psyche, into our subconscious, into our emotions, into our innermost being. Grace must fuel how we think, react, move and have our being. The efficacy of grace is in the eating. Unity is not primarily a result, but an energy, a motivation. We do not reach the world so that we become unified; we reach the world because we are unified.

When either unity or grace become the goal (rather than the love and glory of God), perversion inevitably follows our tolerance and concessions. Love and glory bring truth. Loving truth demands unity be forged on the immovable nature of Christ, Christ alone. Truth requires grace be given and received on God's atoning terms. Unity and grace are not the goal (attractive as those goals can be). Love and truth are the goal for the glory of God. This is why the brotherhood (v. 14) and the covenants (v. 10) sometimes need to be broken. God will give grace and unity-but not at cost to His own nature, His own glory. For us to value unity and grace over the person of Jesus is to sin. There is no better example of this shocking reality than John the beloved. In 2 John, this loving man calls for grace, mercy, and peace (v. 3). John reminds the elect lady and her children who he loves in truth (v. 1) that loving one another is an ongoing command. John (to whom love and unity are so central, see John 17) then pivots sharply and says: "If anyone does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. . .do not receive him into your house nor greet him" (vv. 9-10).

Grace and unity are tools, not goals. If your overarching goal is to grace people or unify them, you are in danger of corrupting both them and yourself. If your overarching goal is God's love and glory, grace and unity will feed and fuel you well.

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