

# Unity

by Glenn Meldrum

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*Glenn Meldrum emphasizes the critical role of unity among believers as a prerequisite for genuine revival and spiritual awakening.*

**Scripture:** Luke 11:17, John 12:32, John 13:35, John 17:22, Acts 2:17, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 1:27, Hebrews 11:6, Hebrews 12:14

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Glenn Meldrum emphasizes the crucial role of unity among believers in promoting revival, highlighting how division and strife hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. He explores the tension between unity and division in revivals throughout history, noting that opposition often arises from within the church. Meldrum stresses the importance of unity in the citywide church, pointing out that pastors play a significant role in fostering or hindering unity. He underscores the necessity of loving obedience, faith, and holiness in maintaining unity and experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit for revival.

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## Transcript

Unity among the saints makes them delightfully attractive to the Lord. This is one reason why unity is so vital for the promotion of revival. Whenever Christians conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the Lord Jesus they "stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel" (Phil. 1:27). The opposite also holds true, division and strife are repulsive to God, grieves the Holy Spirit and thwarts the cause of revival.

### Unity And Division

There is an inherent tension between unity and division within the subject of revival. Unity is necessary for revival to come and be sustained, and yet when it comes there will be division. Every revival of which we have substantial information demonstrates that the fiercest opposition arose from within the church and religious community. When God steps down in response to the wholehearted prayers of a few saints some church folk will criticize the move of Holy Spirit and at times even strive to shut it down. This happened to Huss, Savonarola, Luther, Edwards, Wesley, Whitefield, Finney, and countless others. Arthur Wallis commented, "If we find a revival that is not spoken against, we had better look again to ensure that it is a revival" (Wallis, 26).

A consensus in favor of revival will never happen in a local congregation or community. That is not the type of unity necessary for the Lord to rend the heavens. A spiritual awakening will come when He finds a core of unified believers who are earnestly seeking His face for the Spirit to flood the land. Opposition against such saints will arise out of the ranks of those who appear outwardly pious. "Very likely the leading men in the Church will oppose you," declared Finney. "There has always been opposition in the Church. It was this way when Christ was on earth" (Finney, *How To*, 135). Dr. Brown adds to this thought by insisting, "It is tragic but true, revival's greatest opposers will be the 'religious' people who refuse to repent" (Brown, *The End*, 9).

Critics often claim that revival is actually a work of the devil and that is why division arises. Logic not only dispels this argument, but the very fruit produced by an awakening should be proof enough to silence the most avid critic. The devil will never shut down bars, casinos and houses of prostitution through the conversion of sinners. He will never lead men, women and children to Christ, nor will he heal marriages and restore broken homes. It is ludicrous to think that the demonic hordes of hell would awaken lukewarm Christians and turn them into pastors, evangelists and missionaries. Satan will never heal the sin sick soul nor cast himself out of an individual he has possessed for years. How ridiculous to think that the Evil One would voluntarily give glory to Almighty God in any way, shape or form. It would be foolish to reject a genuine move of the Spirit because divisions arise (remember what happened with Jesus). Not just that, much of the division found in revival may actually be motivated by satanic influences.

As noted in the last chapter, revival must be established and maintained upon the Word of God. Christians in the midst of a divine visitation need be conscience of how they direct the revival. Scriptural integrity and obedience to the Spirit's leading are of the utmost importance. There is much that can take place in revival that the Scriptures neither support nor speak against. This means that vigilance, self-control and sensitivity to the Holy Ghost are indispensable in pastoring the people in a move of God.

Even though God desires every Christian to embrace His visitation He knows that will not be the case. The Lord will pour out His glory through those who walk in loving obedience and passionately desire His fame to be known throughout the land. During the summer of 1828 a revival began in a rural community in Oswego County, New York. One hundred and fifty souls were irrefutably converted to Christ in a short period of time. "People were at a loss to account for it. But wonder was at an end with the godly when it was learned that two old men, living a mile apart, had selected a point midway, in a cluster of trees, and there at the down-going of the sun had met for months to pray for the out-pouring of the Spirit of God" (Riley, 23). In this case there were only two men who prayed in unity for the cause of revival. These two men prevailed with God and reaped a glorious harvest for the Savior.

### Relationship With Jesus

Jesus taught that a kingdom or house "divided against itself will be ruined" (Lk. 11:17). He further stated, "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters" (Lk. 11:23). The only way Christ's disciples can live in unity with each other is for them to be first and foremost in unity with their Lord. Everything that divides a person from the Savior will cause division with others and that which is detrimental to our relationships with people is damaging to our relationship with the Son. When people cause division, whether in their church, business or family, they do so because they have not fully surrendered to Jesus. As a result, they perpetuate the acts of the sinful nature which are always destructive to relationships (Gal. 5:19-21). When saints live in a right relationship with the Lord there will be power to restore and build right relationships with others.

Martin Luther made a powerful observation, "If the greatest commandment is to love God with heart, mind, soul, and strength . . . then the greatest sin is the failure to do so" (Comfort, Friends, 122). When we fail to love the Lord with everything that is within us we will never be able to love others correctly. If we have not humbled ourselves before our Maker, we will surely be proud, prejudice and critical towards others. Lack of right submission towards family, bosses and spiritual leaders is a sure sign of lack of surrender to Jesus. Our deficiency in compassion for a dying culture means that we do not know God's heart and are not willing to walk as He walked in this world. In short, what we are in relationship with God is all that we will be in relationship with others.

Unity with our Redeemer is directly dependant upon faith and holiness. The ancient word for faith, "feyth," is rooted in the idea, "to unite," and "to bind." This speaks "of the spiritual work of faith, as that which, on man's side, unites him to God for salvation" (James Orr, ISBE, vol. 4, pg. 12). Genuine faith incorporates the surrender of our entire being to the Lord, which in turn unites us with Him. Faith begins with believing that God "exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Heb. 11:6). As we live a life of faith we "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

Holiness and unity work hand in hand. The Scriptures command us to, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). Here we find that unity with others is interrelated to personal holiness. Everything that causes division among people is the result of unholiness in the lives of individuals. God, who is the absolute perfection of holiness, will not dwell with those who are unholy. Sin in all of its various forms makes us unholy and separates us from His presence. The sin that separates us from God is the same sin separates us from each other. Lack of personal and corporate holiness grieves the Holy Spirit, which prevents His glory from being revealed in the home or local assembly.

The focal point of unity among Christians begins with their unity with the Savior. Paul instructed us to, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). Unity of the Spirit is unity by the Spirit. Harmony among the saints is contingent upon their walking in the Spirit so they do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). To walk in the Spirit we must "live in the Spirit." To live in the Spirit means we are to live in unbroken fellowship with God (Gal. 5:25). Through Colossians 1:8 we learn that brotherly love is a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. According to our loving obedience to the Holy Spirit will be the depth of our love for others.

## THE CITYWIDE CHURCH

For revival to come to a church, city or nation, it is essential that a high priority be placed on unity within Christian homes, the local church and the citywide church. There has never been a genuine revival where there was not unity among a core of God's people. Just a brief look at present day revivals that are transforming cities and nations around the world reaffirms this truth. We are either agents for unity or agents for division. Unity is our personal and corporate responsibility and must be actively pursued. The unity may be limited to those desperate saints who aggressively pursue God; nonetheless, unity remains a criterion for revival.

As stated earlier, revival will always have its critics from within and without. Dr. Brown maintained, "You can have controversy without revival, but you cannot have revival without controversy" (Brown, Answer Book, 7). Jonathan Edwards said it a little differently, "If [we] wait to see a work of God without difficulties and stumbling-blocks, it will be like a fool's waiting at the river side to have the water all run by. A work of

God without stumbling blocks is never to be expected. "It must needs be that offences come" (Edwards, Revival, 133).

In considering the citywide church, most of the blame for division falls upon the shoulders of pastors. One example consists of pastors who become territorial, protecting their own turf. This happens both within denominational affiliations and in community settings. Our unwillingness to help other local Christian churches grow is a sure sign that this spiritual malady is present. Division and uncooperativeness among Bible-believing congregations prevents revival from coming to a community or from having far reaching affects.

Another form of division that pastors often propagate can be seen in their lack of involvement in the citywide church. This could even be construed as a sin of omission, not doing what they are called to do (Eph. 4:3-6). Pastors can become so busy in tending to their own flock that they make no time to build relationships with pastors who commonly long for revival. This can be just as divisive as fighting over church hoppers, doctrine or polity. When pastors rarely go outside of their congregational or denominational boundaries to evangelize their city and support other churches they neglect Christ's citywide church and a perishing world. God has called His shepherds to look beyond their own congregations and become pastors to their city. Unity for revival needs to begin with the leaders. "Give us a revived ministry," challenged D. L. Moody, "and we shall soon see a revived church" (Moody, 216).

Part of the source of division among the citywide church is found in local congregations. Any assembly that is suffering under the satanic attacks of division will be worthless in advancing Christ's kingdom on a citywide basis. Division in the local assembly destroys their spiritual vision, strips them of Holy Ghost power and incapacitates an entire congregation. Some churches have been plagued for years with the curse of a contentious, critical spirit. Paul warned, "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other" (Gal. 5:15). When pastors and parishioners grow weary from the strife they no longer see the pain of the unsaved living under the tyranny of the devil. They have fallen into a spiritual stupor where they have become self-absorbed with their pain, problems and divisions.

Division is always the by-product of the lusts of the flesh, whether it's in the home, local church or citywide church. To put it plainly, division is sin. Sin separates a man from God and a man from his family and friends. It divides husband and wife, parents and children, churches and Christian communities. The ugliest form of division is that which is supposedly perpetuated in the name of God. Possibly the greatest and most damaging form of spiritual blindness can be found in the man who thinks his divisive acts are divinely ordained. Jesus alerted us to this damnable problem when He said, "If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Mt. 6:23).

Divisive people become tools of Satan to either stop a revival or never allow one to come. They are responsible for attacking and destroying God's anointed leaders and of harming Christ's little lambs. This sin is so hideously evil that it damns souls to hell while those who commit such crimes against Almighty God think they are doing His service. King Solomon told us a terrifying truth, "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him . . . a man who stirs up dissension among brothers (Pr. 6:16, 19). Jehovah holds some very strong and passionate views about people who cause dissension in the local assembly and in the family.

James asked believers an important question, "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (Jam. 4:1). Many pastors and churches are held hostage

by power-mongering deacons, ruling families, large donors or long time members. Bernard Jordan commented on this issue, "A person with a rebellious spirit exalts the importance of his own ideas above his leader's ideas. . . . A person with a disloyal or rebellious spirit develops a critical attitude towards his spiritual leaders. . . . [which] always manifests itself in murmuring and contentious words. . . . [He] distorts the views of his spiritual leaders . . . gives recognition to others who are dissatisfied and justifies his opposition to his spiritual leaders" (Jordan, 71-73).

People responsible for causing division should tremble at the Lord of Host's intense wrath at that sin and thoroughly repent so they can be restored in right relationship with Him. Otherwise they may hear from Christ's lips, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Mt. 7:23; KJV). Thankfully, Jesus freely offers mercy to all who repent and prove that repentance with a changed life.

## PASTORAL SUPPORT

One of the hardest ministries in the world is pastoring. A man or woman can start a new pastorate with joy and vigor and in no time at all be battling depression. Criticisms and personal attacks can be crushing to a leader and his family. Our spiritual leaders not only have to battle all that comes at them from the world, they must stand against contentious people who claim to be Christian. It's time we restore the truth that church members who fight against the pastor, his family and the pastoral leadership are actually raising a coup d'etat against the Lord of Hosts. To rebel against Jehovah's appointed leader is to rebel against Jehovah Himself. Virtually all church divisions are nothing other than people's sinful nature acting under the influence of demonic forces. Such actions are destructive, damnable and stop revival. This problem is a spiritual epidemic in the American church today.

How rare it is for rebellious and contentious church folk to repent of their divisiveness and make restitution (Ex. 22:1-15; Lev. 6:1-6, 24:21; Lk. 19:8). Revivalist Charles Finney emphatically insisted that those who surrender their lives to Christ must make restitution whenever possible. He asserted that when people do not right the wrongs within their power to do so that they have not truly repented and thus remain in their sin. Self-righteous pride blinds the eyes of contentious people to the great evil they have perpetuated and prevents them from receiving forgiveness, perhaps even salvation itself.

The success of a community of faith directly depends upon the pastor touching the Lord and then touching the people. When churches abuse or drive out their pastors rather than love and support them they are sure to be defeated congregations. Pastors are not disposable commodities; they are gifts to the Body of Christ. Those who fight against the man of God fight against God Himself and those who try to control their shepherd strive to manipulate the kingdom of Christ for their own selfish and evil desires. Such people do great damage to the Savior's kingdom.

Contentious churches have disgraced the cause of Christ and their reputations are repulsive to the unsaved. Non-Christians will not want to be a part of a church full of ravenous sheep that bite and devour one another. Dr. Mark Rutland told the truth when he said, ". . . sheep can bite. In fact, they can knock a pastor down, stomp on him, and drag him into the bushes for dead" (Teykl, 38). If, perchance, an outsider became part of such a church the hypocrites would "make him twice as much a son of hell" as they are (Mt. 23:15). God is good to keep the unsaved from becoming a part of a contentious church.

Without question, every pastor is looking for his Aaron and Hur, his Joshua and Caleb, his Timothy and Barnabas. The pastoral ministry is a great responsibility that weighs heavily upon a person. The load becomes easier when the saints support the man of God. Unity does not mean that we always agree with

everything the leader does, just that we will stand by his side in loving support. "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you" (Heb. 13:17).

Unity brings victory while division offers sure defeat. Average leaders can accomplish tremendous things for the Savior when faithful men and women support them through the successes and battles of ministry. Revival is obtainable when the saints support the man of God and in unison cry out for the Lord of heaven to send a Holy Ghost revival.

### Authority Through Unity

Loving the brethren and unity are synonymous. Jesus thought that brotherly love was so important that He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples" (Jn. 13:35). The Savior gave the world the authority to judge whether we are Christians according to the love we show one to another. One reason He may have granted the unsaved this authority is because they can often discern our spiritual condition better than we can. Francis Schaeffer commented on this verse. "The church is to be a loving church in a dying culture. How, then, is the dying culture going to consider us? Jesus says, 'By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' In the midst of the world, in the midst of our present dying culture, Jesus is giving a right to the world. Upon his authority he gives the world the right to judge whether you and I are born-again Christians on the basis of our observable love toward all Christians" (Schaeffer, 12-13).

According to Jesus, the love we manifest to the brethren and a perishing world is the proof of our Christianity. He was not referring to a sentimental love that stays at a protective distance from others, but a holy love that moves men and women to turn the world upside down by laying their lives down for others. Through such sacrificial love, which is representative of Christ's love, we obtain the authority to speak to a spiritually dying world. Apart from such charity we are "only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal," powerless to change the church or the world for their eternal good (1 Cor. 13:1).

King David presented two wonderful illustrations on the subject of unity in Psalms 133. First of all, David likened the unity of the saints to the anointing Aaron received as Israel's first high priest. The anointing oil used on Aaron contained a combination of principle spices, thereafter, used to anoint every high priest, and in time, the kings of Israel. Without the anointing Aaron was not fit to serve Jehovah and the people; without the anointing we are not fit to serve Christ, one another, or those who do not know the Savior. Notice that the anointing was given for the benefit of serving others, not for selfish ends.

The second illustration David portrayed was of the heavy morning dew that falls on Mt. Hermon. This regular heaven sent dew brings refreshing to a dry and weary land. Without this dew everything would die. So it is with Christians. Take away the unity of the saints and everything in the local church and community spiritually dies because the dew of heaven is withheld. A spiritual dearth then sweeps the land killing all who would look for the church to be a place of refuge but find it a battle zone. But oh, when the saints dwell together in unity, it is a taste of heaven on earth; it replaces death with life, refreshes the soul, makes beautiful the Body of Christ and anoints her to build His kingdom.

In Christ's high priestly prayer of John 17 the Son interceded to the Father for our unity. He prayed, "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" (Jn. 17:22-23). Jesus is offering to give the church the glory He shared with the Father so

that the world may know that He is Lord and Savior. Contention, insubordination and unforgiveness destroys that unity and forfeits the wonder of His glory in the church. This quenches the work of the Holy Spirit to save and transform lives, which leaves the church spiritually barren and bankrupt.

Jesus prayed that we would be brought into "complete unity" so that the world may know that the Father sent the Son. Actions speak louder than words. Our division and rebellion declares to secular society that we do not really believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be (Jn. 17:22-23). Divisive churches actually advances a lie that God is not a God of love and that He is powerless to help the people love each other. Lack of unity between Bible-believing churches sends a false message to the unsaved that Jesus cannot unite His own people. The breakdown of Christian marriages proclaims an ugly falsehood that Jesus cannot change lives, heal marriages or impart love and forgiveness to Christian homes. This is no small issue. Our divisiveness has stripped us of spiritual authority to speak to unbelievers.

When the day of Pentecost came, the Lord found the believers in unity with Himself first and then with each other. This unity opened the door for Holy Spirit power that can transform the world. "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people" (Acts 2:17). Here lies the answer we need for the church--the power of God's manifest presence--revival. We need a new Pentecost that produces the fires of revival that can sweep the world. The unity of the Spirit produces the authority and power of the Spirit. Pentecost came because the saints yielded themselves to Christ by going into the upper room to seek His face in desperation and unity. It worked! And still does!

## Conclusion

Those who investigate the revivals of the past and present find the undisputable fact that unity is not an option, but a necessity. According to the depth of unity among the saints will be the influence of the awakening. Unity brings with it a great sense of expectation and joy. Such were the fruits of the revival that broke out at Charlotte Chapel in Edinburgh. "The people were now on tiptoe with expectancy for a revival. A Conference on January 22, 1906, addressed by several workers who had visited Wales, lasted from 3:30 p.m. until midnight.

"It was, however, at a late prayer meeting, held in the evening at 9:30 that the fire of God fell. There was nothing, humanly speaking, to account for what happened. Quite suddenly, upon one and another came an overwhelming sense of the reality and awfulness of His presence and of eternal things. Life, death, and eternity seemed suddenly laid bare. Prayer and weeping began, and gained in intensity every moment.

"It is useless being a spectator looking on, or praying for it, in order to catch its spirit and breath. It is necessary to be in it, praying in it, part of it, caught by the same power, swept by the same wind." (Olford, 129-132). It is of the utmost importance that the saints tear down the walls of division within the local and citywide church or revival will never come.

Pastors and congregations must look beyond their own self-preservation and recklessly abandon themselves to the Savior. They must live God's Word no matter the personal cost by walking in a childlike faith that simply trusts in His great and precious promises. The tremendous need of the hour is to tear down every thought, word and deed that destroys the unity of the saints and hinders the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It's time we thwart the devil's plans and reap havoc on his kingdom instead.

Only radically surrendered lives will passionately endeavor to build the kingdom of our dear Lord and Savior whether they receive recognition or not. There is a cause greater than our own congregations,

personal fame, ease of life or secure incomes--it is Christ and His glory revealed. We have the promise that when Jesus is lifted up, He will draw all men unto Himself (Jn. 12:32). He is waiting for us to lift Him up in our homes, churches and cities so He can draw men, women and child unto Himself through the awesome wonder of revival. He gave us this promise and will fulfill His part when we have fulfilled ours.

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