

Unity- But at What Cost?

Today we are postponing the lesson on Genesis that I had previously said we would do for the very important reason that will come out as this lesson unfolds. When a kid grows up on the streets he's understood as being "street smart".

Pro 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

I grew up in a dysfunctional family so it has become easy for me to see dysfunction even before it happens. When my Dad was home my sister and I were treated just like the other seven but the moment he left for work, my sister and I, who had a different mother than the others, were both physically, immorally and mentally mistreated. I came to know hypocrisy and deceit even when others couldn't. What was it that I would learn from such a bad experience? It's like in the movie "The Spiderwick Chronicles" where looking through a certain lens one could see all kinds of creatures where, in a movie obviously based on Hollywood imaginations, such beings truly existed and nobody could see them but through the lens. It can be a blessing and a curse, depending on how we view the issue at hand; the subject concerning the model of having a men's business meeting where no scriptural eldership exists. But before going forward we need to understand where there must either be a command, an example or something inferred by giving book, chapter and verse if anyone on either side wishes to make an issue where none may even exist.

1Co 14:40 But all things should be done decently and in order.

Most meetings, including congregational, fail their objectives when chaos is the rule of the day. We decided to rotate the chair but how are the men to chair a meeting if there are no preset guidelines in place to do such? And where do we find scriptural authority for even having a chair? Would **not** having a man conducting such meetings be considered "decently and in order"? Who is to call such meeting in the absence of elders?

Our meeting procedures have never fit the 'norm' of many in the brotherhood (*until recently*), so I was perplexed with the idea of changing them until I was given the opportunity to pour over some suggested readings on this topic.

Citing the numerous meetings of other congregations as proof of their not being 'scriptural' means nothing and should hold no sway. Book, chapter and verse, please! I equate such meetings to guns; left alone, guns don't kill. It's the attitude behind those using them, using the gun (*MBM*) as a tool to accomplish an (*evil*) agenda when implemented for such. When a gun is used for hunting or self-defense they are being used to accomplish what is good. Left alone, without an agenda, men's business meetings also accomplish what is good. Sadly, it only takes one or more incidents for the gun control crowd to come out of the woodwork. The same goes with these meetings. Isn't it sad, when brethren can't "live in peace; [so that] the God of love and peace will be with [us]" (*2 Cor 13:11*)?

A congregation in another part of PA had a split about 35 years ago over this very issue. At that time there were some younger women who were adamant about "women's rights" and not "women's roles". They wanted to be more involved in the decision making process where the Bible is clear on both areas; rights and roles. If there was anything that would be done that would usurp the scriptural authority of the men by the women in the church it would be in the final decision making under which all are to be subordinate.

Some things **are** difficult to change because change, in and of itself, means stepping out into the unknown (*away from comfort zones*) even if the status quo isn't working.

Not being one that has any desire to change, I fear any change, without having been given the opportunity to study why such a change is so necessary, might be the opening of a down-ward spiral away from doctrinal truth, which from experience, I've seen take place in other congregations. And, regrettably, such fear of change is what keeps many from leaving their respective denominations in order to be "transferred... to the kingdom of His dear Son" (*Col 1:13*). Fear then, is good when it fits the situation.

Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Eph 5:21 ...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Temperament

The subject of temperament has been in discussion (*whether outright or in whispers*) and I believe I am the one that it is directed at. And I do understand that my temper, although not as ill as it once was because of the Gospel of Christ, can be goaded into reappearance by anyone who knows "where I tie my goat" and who has an evil desire to expose it. If we are to respect the different idiosyncrasies that we all have, my plea is for those who wish to use my faults against me, not attempt to bring out my temper so as for them to claim the moral high ground. Too often my frustration over doctrinal matters not being respected has certain brethren falsely deeming it as outbursts of anger or temper tantrums as though I'm a spoiled brat who doesn't get his way. That too can "find my goat", telling me I'm getting angry over and over when I protest that I'm only frustrated.

1Co 2:11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him?...

Even though the relationship of Eph 6:4 isn't what's being discussed here, the moral applies when it involves one brother who antagonizes another for the purpose already stated. Which can and does cause a loss of credibility, of the one doing the provoking, when more important matters arise.

Eph 6:4 Fathers, do not **provoke** your children **to anger**, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (*Emp. Added*)

And we need to be very careful of those things that may be considered "gossip" (*Rom 1:29*) because such can produce "factions" (*1 Cor 11:19*) and many a congregation has been split because of "cliques". Such only brings to mind 1 Thes 5:22.

1Th 5:22 Abstain from every form of evil.

I have dissected the passages in favor of changing the way we, as the men of the congregation, run the everyday business of the church. Trust me when I say this, all this research is being done so I can come to the conclusion as to where **I** stand on this issue. I'm not 100 % sure either way now that scriptural references have been cited as a means of changing a long practiced (*although not perfect since we are human*) way of conducting the business of the church.

(I look at this issue as being one that could decide the eternal fate of all who have an “opinion” on the subject of gender differences, that differ from inspiration, whose lines are not to be crossed, that are plainly stated in the Bible. It can also be one reason we aren’t growing, not doing Bible things in Bible ways. Since we obviously are not growing numerically, the only conclusion that I’ve come to is that God isn’t giving us the increase [1 Cor 3:6] and I blame that on attitudes against the work itself and against those who are in the thick of it, namely me. And I sincerely regret if I have been on the wrong side of this issue.) Why can’t we allow the scripture to do the leading without bias?

Who is being addressed in Acts 15?

What is the subject?

To whom does this subject concern?

Who is being addressed? Men or woman?

Act 15:1 But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the **brothers** (*Gk.80*), "Unless **you** are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, **you** cannot be saved." (*Emp. Added*)

- Rhetorical question: **Who** was to be circumcised according to this false teaching? The whole church or just the men?

Who sent them?

Act 15:3 So, being sent on their way **by the church** (*Gk.1577- congregation*), they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. (*Emp. Added*)

Who welcomed them in Jerusalem?

Act 15:4 When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by **the church** (*Gk.1577*) and the **apostles** (*Gk.652- commissioners of Christ*) and the **elders**, and they declared all that God had done with them. (*Emp. Added*)

Who came together to consider the subject of circumcision?

Rhetorical question: Were there female apostles and elders?

Act 15:6 The **apostles** and the **elders** were gathered together **to consider this matter**.

Who were in attendance to hear this matter? (*Emp. Added*)

Act 15:7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, "**Brothers**, (*KJV- “Men [Gk.435- a man]and brethren [Gk.80- a brother]”*) you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. (*Emp. Added*)

Another passage with the same Greek word (*80*) but in a different context.

Act 6:3 Therefore, brothers (*Gk.80- Thayer: a fellow believer*), pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom **we** will appoint to this duty. (*“brothers” refers to “the whole gathering”- v. 5*) (*Emp. Added*)

- Context demands proper interpretation. Both passages use the **same** Greek word.

What is the scripturally authoritative order in the decision making process?
How does that resonate with the following passage?

Act 15:22 Then it seemed good to the (a) **apostles** and the (b) **elders, with** the (c) **whole church** (*which would include women*), to choose men from among them... (*Emp. Added*)

The apostles and elders (*both consisting of the men of the church*) came together (15:6) to decide **before** the church was involved in making the decision “to choose men from among them” (15:22). Why would the women of the congregation be so concerned about their men being circumcised? At least one answer: Whatever affected the men on this matter would have affected the women who had husbands that they would have been intimately involved with, and or sons they obviously didn’t want to have to be put through the act of circumcision. But the men (*apostles and elders*) were the most interested in this subject and were first to make the decision to send anyone. Only **after** the apostles and elders came together (*a meeting that did not include the “whole church”*) was the church involved. They, apostles and elders, then chose to send Barsabas and Silas with Paul...

Act 15:23 with the following letter: "The **brothers**, both the **apostles** and the **elders, to the brothers** who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. 24 Since **we** have heard that some persons have gone out from **us** and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although **we** gave them no instructions, 25 it has seemed good to **us**, having come to one accord, **to choose men** and send them to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (*Emp. Added*)

The “we” and “us” are referring to the “brothers”, the “apostles and the elders” who “heard” of the Gentile situation, being taught that obedience to the Mosaic law as necessary to their salvation. The same “us” were **credited** with the act “to choose men”, so by such a statement, **they** made the choice **before** having the whole church involved. **They** made the decision, presenting their findings to the church for their acceptance and **not** for their approval. Do **inspired men** heed the approval of the church **over** God? (*Act 5:29*)

Act 5:29 But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than men.

Obviously, there are no inspired men today so how do we make such decisions without them (*or elders for that matter*)?

Acts 6

Act 6:2 And **the twelve** (*anytime this conjunction is used it refers to the apostles of Christ*) summoned the full number of the disciples (*the whole church*) and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 3 Therefore, brothers (*Gk.80-Thayer: a fellow-believer, ...of Christians, constituting as it were but a single family*), pick out from among **you** seven **men** of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom **we** will appoint to this duty (*Emp. Added*)

Shows that even though the whole group was brought together to make a decision from among them, who it would be that the apostles (*having the gift of discernment*) would choose to take care of the Grecian widows, the decision was ultimately settled by the apostles and not the whole church. The men and women chose those they felt best able from among their fellowship (*knowing them personally*) but the apostles, who were men, made the **final** decision. **Do we**

not see a pattern here? “The whole gathering” did the choosing (v. 5) before presenting their choices “before the apostles” (v. 6). (*Did that constitute a vote?*) And contrary to the belief that if a woman was more talented than a man (*in this case women **would** have been more talented at taking care of these widows*) why didn’t the twelve ask that they “pick out from among you seven **members** of good repute”? Thus showing, as an **example**, that there **was definitely** a division between the men (*apostles and elders*) and women in making the **final** decision on this occasion. Therefore, as the example shows, division between men and women for the purpose of making **final** decisions **is** scriptural. But the question is asked, how does a church (*including the women*) without elders make decisions since we understand the church is not a democracy? Answer: Look to the “*natural order that exists in the very nature of the Divine scheme of things.*” (Wayne Jackson) (1 Cor 11:3) Who makes the final decisions, even if women would be present in the decision making process? How can we say “majority rules” since that would constitute a democracy? Isn’t the church a theocracy? Is reaching a consensus the same as voting? How is making decisions on who pays the bills or even who preaches, how is that not done were it not for taking a vote unless one man has more clout than the rest and he makes all the decisions for everyone, either outright or presumed? Why have bylaws? Who makes any non-Biblical policy that would affect the congregation without the expediency of having someone in charge of, say, the bank account? Who decides who is to be in charge of the church finances? Who determines what comes from the pulpit? And most importantly, who decides when there is a disagreement on a particular passage that may cause a division?

1Pe 5:5 Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

In the age of women’s ‘liberation’ (*it actually made them slaves to a world view*) the world outside the church (*speaking here concerning gender roles*) should never influence the mindset of those who are in positions to make decisions that might alter the truth. Such a movement has, in many ways, affected gender related authority where it pertains to spiritual leadership. True, the epistles were sent to the churches (*including the women*), but the content of the letters differentiated the genders according to authoritative roles; Christ, over men, over women (1 Cor 11:3).

1Ti 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet (*Gk.2271- stillness*).

Gal 3:28

How far do we take Gal 3:28 when it comes to different levels of authority in the body of Christ?

“Some would do away with the rule entirely as obsolete on the ground that in Christ there is neither male nor female; but this is undoubtedly unwarranted, for while the Gospel emancipated woman, it did not change her natural relation so as to make her the equal of man.”
McGarvey

Our equality in this passage only goes as far as we are all souls equally in need of Christ’s blood to save us, thus making us no different in that respect. It does not, however, disregard other passages that teach gender related roles.

“...but the individual sense is almost wholly lost in the collective, so that all those racial distinctions and all the fictitious distinctions of caste, and even the distinction of gender, which made a man look upon a woman with contempt, are lost sight of.” McGarvey

As Wayne Jackson noted under the subject of “Hindrances to Unity”:

“Time and again men have arisen who, more than anything else, had a passion for notoriety, a lust for fame, hence, they either created an issue, or seized upon one, in order to thrust themselves into prominence”.

“Most every church that has been forced to take care of its affairs in the ‘men’s business meeting’ format has encountered headstrong creatures of this temperament, and on occasion, churches have been divided as a result. These attitudes are evil.”

Which is why we all are to...

2Co 13:5 Examine [ourselves], to see whether [we] are in the faith. Test [ourselves]. Or do [we] not realize this about [ourselves], that Jesus Christ is in [us]?--unless indeed [we] fail to meet the test!

A Christian who is honest with himself (*or herself*) may find they are on the wrong side of an issue because of being “puffed up with conceit and [may] fall into the condemn-nation of the devil” (1 Tim 3:6). I can concur because there have been incidents when I had to apologize for such. None of us are immune. This is why a new convert is never to be appointed to the position of elder (1 Tim 3:6). Power corrupts even the humblest among us. When a self-examination reveals error, the one who admits their mistakes (*and or sinful attitudes*) and, in truth, humbly changes, they are the ones who have no “lust for fame”. They make for better ‘leaders’ than the ones who ‘create issues and seize upon them’. The humble have no desire to make themselves everyone’s friend as a way of gaining such ‘notoriety’.

We can always know, who those among us are, the ones that are passionate for the truth if we will only look. By their fruits they are known (Mat 7:16). On the other hand, there are those, who have always existed since the inception of the church, who “like to put [themselves] first” (3 Jn 9), who aren’t so easily exposed, whose pride won’t let them realize it, and who think that others are guilty of such a detestable sin, but never themselves. They continue in their own state of denial, especially when those close to them have been so charmed, having “[spoken] twisted things, to draw away disciples after them” (Act 20:31). Everywhere they go, **discord follows** (*and God hates discord according to Pro 6:19*)! They come off as being humble and only trying to help the situation but in secret they are miserable, taking their frustrations out on others in the church who don’t agree with them, while all along out of the view of the rest. They even make childish threats behind the scenes so as to blame others for their leaving (*if it came to that*) in order to further their quest for prominence. And in most cases they refuse to go toe to toe when asked to sit down side by side with open Bibles to discuss whatever matter or “issue” they’ve “created”. They claim not to be ‘the devil’s advocates’ but in reality they truly are. Such only hinders progress, thus the lack of increase.

In truth, I have no desire for the notoriety that John spoke of concerning Diotrephes and never will. Sadly though, when my thoughts are expressed in meetings and elsewhere, even when my input **should** matter (*just as what others say matters*) it has often been deemed that I am another Diotrephes who wants to run the church. Why? Because I have, in some instances (*not all obviously*), had a better idea that the majority have agreed with? How sad and discouraging.

Which is why I long for us to get to the point of having an established, Godly eldership so this congregation can be lead according to Divine inspiration, if and when that day arrives. The main reason this congregation was established was because of the lack of scripturally qualified men in the eldership, and not wanting to submit to their authority because of it.

Obviously, it could be years before we have scripturally appointed men, but in the meantime we need to get this congregation to the point of “there [being] no divisions among [us]” (*1 Cor 1:10*)! But not to be unified at all costs.

Having to make this study, and presenting it instead of what was supposed to be presented, is further evidence of our not being cohesive in our fellowship, when I should be working on other lessons that will benefit the Mt. Holly church, but now have been forced into “the defense of the Gospel” (*Php 1:16*) since passages were cited that needed to be reviewed. And I do appreciate when brethren have ready such passages before making propositions without them! Without which, the subject to change (*MBM*) is without merit. And if I am to exert time and effort on this I want to make sure all i’s are dotted and t’s crossed. If only all this energy expended on such discord was placed on carrying the Gospel into the community, where would we think our growth might have been by now? Sadly, there are those who have ...

1Ti 6:4 ... an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth...

The Lack of an Eldership

I have seen time and again from experience (*soon to be three decades*) where men have arisen who have desired the office of presbyter almost from the time of conversion. Such reveals a nature that exposes their lust for authority. Any new convert who is genuine in his search for the truth, will understand that those privileges belong to the seasoned and Biblically qualified men among us and not to some, yet ‘wet behind the Biblical ears’ new babe in Christ. And just having an eldership for the sake of having one is no excuse for going against Divine inspiration, as though men know better than God on the matter. It only shows an aura of sloth with the idea of having those chosen take care of the business of ‘running’ the church so they don’t have to lift a finger or produce one drop of sweat. I’ve even heard **brethren** say such men are ‘qualified’ “*as long as he meets **most** of the qualifications*”, or “*he’ll grow into it*” and “*those qualifications are only qualities that he **should** possess*”. If in baking a cake according to a recipe and one omits certain ingredients, does that make the cake according to what was prescribed? Then shouldn’t the qualifications according to the Divine will carry an even higher respect? If a man isn’t already an elder before becoming an elder (*i.e., he’s already doing the work*) than he shouldn’t even be considered for it. That along with only having been a blood bought child of God without the years of wisdom that a more seasoned brother has.

Now I apologize for any and all sin that I have committed in the discussion of this issue since it has been ‘created’. Not that having civil men’s business meetings will send any of us to Hell, but that once they become uncivil (*as can congregational meetings*), there has to be an alternative. Either we cast out those who get irritated (*which would include the majority*) or switch to doing things Biblically where no mention of such a model as ‘business meetings’ can be found. But, in honoring scripture, we cannot forget... Christ, over men, over women (*1 Cor 11:3*).

If and when we would switch over to monthly (*week of the month to fluctuate in order to have as many brethren present as possible- 1 Cor 11:33 “wait for one another”*) congregational

meetings, civility **has** to be the rule if not but for the sake of our newer members because we don't want to "destroy the one for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15). So, I would suggest we adopt a "rule of order", if such meetings are to be successful and there would be no "filibustering" so that all are able to make their points (*so nobody would become discouraged by the lack of order*). In order to accomplish the Divine will, we have been given leverage, not the right to change it, but to employ an expedient in accomplishing the will of God. Example: Some believe having a piano to keep the songs we sing in tune for God to be pleased with our singing as an expedient. That mindset is not what expediency is all about since there is scripture that refutes such. An example of a true expedient would be in having bulletins to guide the worship, how to get to worship or in where to meet. A car and established church building would fulfill such without going against the Divine will. Thus the expediency of the chair. He has no more authority than a "church mouse" in making decisions. He is only employed for the purpose of keeping things running "decently and in order". So the chair can still rotate, the minutes can still be read, etc. But we should never go against scripture by not honoring Divinely established Biblically sanctioned gender roles of authority. I pray for the day when we can have a Godly eldership to lead this infant body, that we all will submit to. But...

*"Unity must never be sought at the expense of **compromising truth**".*

*"While every informed and conscientious Christian would never budge from the word of truth for the sake of a **false** unity, the wise person acknowledges that perfect agreement will never be achieved in all matters- nor is it required".*

On this, brother Jackson cited the "*difference of opinion that arose between Barnabas and Paul*" [Act 15] and "*That rift, however, did not destroy their fundamental unity in the Lord*". Why? Because that issue was **not** a doctrinal one.

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