

Traditions Are Not Divinely Inspired

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As we approach the Scriptures, we are confronted with a Babel of interpretations competing for our consideration. Our search for truth takes tremendous courage to reexamine familiar texts in new ways, that is to say, interpretations outside the boundaries of our own interpretative community. Often times, God's people dismiss the view points of someone else by loosely employing the term *liberal*, a word that conveys negative overtones. This essay is written to encourage the Christian community to reexamine so-called evidence and to rethink the hand-me-down arguments set forth by many sincere Christians to justify their separation from other genuine and honest believers. This study represents years of intense study, which led me out of legalism to "freedom in Christ." My traditions made it almost impossible for me to read the Word of God accurately. I had to learn to reevaluate the recycled traditions of the church fathers. I soon learned that we are not the free people that we think we are. For one to disagree with the status quo was/is tantamount to disagreeing with God.

When Jesus began His public ministry (AD 30), he came under attack from the religious leaders. The numerous controversies with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and scribes stemmed over His rejection of their oral traditions—traditions which went back about two hundred years. Christians today are also faced with four hundred years of traditions going back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation. The Churches of Christ are also laden with two hundred years of traditions passed on from the Stone/Campbell Movement that is also known as the American Restoration Movement. The Churches of Christ developed from the Zwinglian (Zwingli: 1484-1531) side of the Reformation Movement.¹

I do not deny the value of traditions, in and of themselves, but I do **not** maintain that traditions are divinely inspired. The ultimate authority is the Word of God. Some readers may think that I focus too much on the traditions found within the denominational Church of Christ. Nevertheless, this book has its primary focus on unity among God's children. One of the main objectives of this reading is to assist believers in learning how to differentiate between traditions and the Holy Scriptures. Traditionalists generally seek to minimize freedom in Christ and reduce flexibility within our thinking. **Within certain fellowships, the greatest error that a brother or sister can be guilty of is to study his or her Bible more than other believers.**

¹ See C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 1988). It is significant that the movement by the Campbells were begun as a Reformation Movement, not a Restoration Movement. The Reformation Movement sought to bring about unity within the various denominations.

The principles presented in this essay apply to all of the various denominations within Christendom, not just the Churches of Christ. Baptists are divided; Presbyterians are divided; Methodists are divided; and Churches of Christ are divided. Christians are often harassed or made to feel guilty when they do not follow traditional patterns established by their own denomination. When churches substitute human ideas or traditions for the written Word of God, the result is human oppression, coercion, cruelty, tyranny, and domination. Since I refused to abide by the rules of the one-cup and non-Sunday-school Churches of Christ, the leaders excommunicated me about 1968. Why? I could not go in the direction they demanded.

I will follow this chapter with My Pilgrimage of Faith, which study will trace my early pilgrimage of faith with an emphasis upon the background of the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement and its abuse of Scripture. Since the Churches of Christ are divided over the so-called five acts of worship, I also will deal with a forth coming study on this current philosophy of worship. In this series of essays, I will write another chapter on how to read the Word of God more accurately. Since instrumental music is another obstacle to fellowship within the numerous divisions within this once united movement, I think it necessary to analyze the non-instrument philosophy in this series of essays

By briefly investigating the beliefs of the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, we can reasonably conclude that one view is right and the other view is wrong. Christians must learn to be tolerant, sensitive, and loving toward others. God's Gospel is the uniting power for believers. This essay, and the ones following, will focus on the divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement, even though the principles set forth in this chapter and the ones following are applicable to all the various fellowships. **As we reflect upon unity within the Christian community, we cannot help but recall the prayer of Jesus to the Father concerning oneness among His disciples. Yet, this prayer has gone unheeded by many sincere Christians.** Within the Christian community, we witness division and hatred on every street corner. The various divisions within Christendom are not limited to those within the Churches of Christ, but it is a common factor within the Body of Christ as a whole. What are the major causes of divisions within the Churches of Christ? What are the main reasons of partitions within the rest of God's family? What is the biblical solution to the separations within the Body of Christ?

We must stop calling individuals "false teachers" whenever they do not agree with our interpretation of a passage that is generally lifted from its context. It is not uncommon for Christians to do what I call "*piece-meal*" interpretation. In other words, they wrench a passage from its context and then build their movement upon an isolated text. How do we determine who is and who is not an unhealthy teacher. If we assign this phrase to individuals who simply disagree with our opinions, there will never be unity within the company of the redeemed. If we continue to adopt certain terms (clichés) without discrimination, fractures will continue to proliferate within the fellowship of God's children.

Divisions proliferate, or multiply, when we do not know how to interpret the Scriptures. Christians frequently divide as a result of an improper approach to God's written Word. Within the church of Jesus, we witness that Christ's body is fragmented into warring factions over the traditions handed down by our forefathers within the various denominations. Through the years, Christians have divided into numerous splinter groups. Even within the Churches of Christ, they

are alienated into about twenty-five militaristic segments. In all these splinter groups, we discover sincere Christians who seek to be true to the Word of God. What is common in all the splinter groups is the identification of their interpretation with the Word of God itself. The interpretations, in many areas, is simply tradition passed on from our forefathers. Jaroslav Pelikan calls attention to the devastating effects of tradition upon the Body of Christ:

Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. The reformers of every age, whether political or religious or literary, have protested against the tyranny of the dead, and in doing so have called for innovation and insight in place of tradition.²

In any society of God's family, we discern certain clichés that appear in order to give credence to the actions of certain Christians in their separation from other believers. One objective in this in-depth study is to analyze some of the more frequently misused expressions to foster division within the community of Resurrection. Another intention of this particular analysis of unity in diversity is to assist elders, preachers, and members within the Churches of Christ to become more adept in correctly handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15).

In order to accomplish this target of the Spirits unity, it is my intention to share with members of the Body of Christ, not just the Churches of Christ, the tools needed to recapture the art of how to read the Bible with the purpose of maintaining the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17:20-23). This exploration of biblical unity analyzes several concepts set forth by many well-meaning Christians who continue to promote division among God's saints. This review of divisions within the Body of Christ discusses the failure on the part of many Christians to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people.

To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). Since God accepted them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow with other Christians for whom Christ died.

Many devout Christians do not realize the purpose of Jesus' prayer because they do not discern who is or who is not a false prophet in the light of the context of the whole of God's Word. Since Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union, this study explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayers for singularity of purpose. Since my personal ministry has been primarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started

² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warlike offshoots, each promoting its own brand of Christianity.³ At present, for example, within the Churches of Christ, we understand that there are approximately twenty-five divisions within this once united body. But now, we realize that each “faction” lays claim to the epithet, “the loyal church.”

Each group maintains that it is speaking where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent. For one not to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group is to receive the label “false prophet.” Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for one to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, we do not distinguish between our critique of God’s Word and the Word of God itself. If one group espouses a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status *quo* of another camp, then the “at odds” fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

Unity among many Churches of Christ is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity,⁴ which is also true in other denominations. Today, there are numerous Churches of Christ that are returning to the biblical concept of unity in diversity. And, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many Christians, the unity-in-conformity group labels the unity-in-diversity fellowship as “false teachers” or “liberal.”⁵ Nowadays, the Churches of Christ, as a whole, are hopelessly engaged in combat. These skirmishes are based upon a faulty reading of many Scriptures that are employed as means of justification for separation from other Christians. One such Scripture is Matthew 7:15: “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”⁶ In order to combat this loose type of explanation, it is necessary for me to examine the correct principles of interpretation with the purpose of combating an illegal use of Scriptures to foster division. The Word of God provides its own environment for a proper understanding of its teachings.

³ See Thomas Campbell, “Declaration and Address,” in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint, 1985, 107, 108 where he writes in Proposition One:

That the Church of Christ upon earth is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

⁴ For an example of this mindset, see Jerry Dickinson, “Unity in Diversity,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 8-9. The one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers, and so on, publish this particular journal. See also Don L. King, “Proper Perspective,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995):2, 7. Billy D. Dickinson writes another insightful article that discloses the inner feelings of this peculiar fellowship, “False Teachers and Fellowship,” *Old Paths Advocate* LXVIII, no. 10 (October 1995): 1, 9. For an in-depth study of this Scripture, see my forthcoming book (*Old Texts through New Eyes*), which should be released by the end of the year 2008.

⁵ See J. E. Choate, “The Baby Boomers and Unity in Diversity,” *Firm Foundation* 108, no. 8 (August 1993): 18-20.

⁶ I have examined numerous Scriptures currently in use by many Christians to justify their separation from other believers over doctrinal matters. See Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press 2009).

This study calls attention to the necessity of in-depth development of context,⁷ which consciousness is essential for proper growth and development and unity in God's *ekklesia* (church). I think it necessary in this *introduction* to briefly discuss some of the issues to set the stage for a proper understanding of why I have written this book. In order to unravel the dilemma within the Churches of Christ, the following scenario of first-century churches should be a guide to us today in seeking to maintain the "unity" of the Spirit.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Within the Churches of Christ, the epithet "false prophet" is assigned to individuals who do not subscribe to a particular interpretation of a distinctive fellowship. Correctness in doctrine, according to some, is the measurement of right standing before God. Imperfection in one's knowledge calls forth the title of false prophet. Since this study is about release from bondage to freedom in Christ, then an analysis of certain historical situations in the New Testament should help to dispel an incorrect classification as to who is and who is not a false prophet in the New Testament writings, which understanding should bring about more unity among God's family.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not making allowances for shortcomings in understanding among some believers in the congregation. Paul calls attention in his first letter to Corinth to a wrong perception of correctness as the criterion by which one is placed in a right relationship with God.

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.** But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Paul did not castigate those with imperfection in knowledge as false teachers/prophets. As we read carefully the various citations from Scripture, we immediately recognize that incomplete knowledge does not necessarily mean that we are false teachers. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is clearly dealing with insufficient knowledge and one's relationship to God—a relationship based upon love, not upon absolute knowledge. Paul develops, in the Corinthian Epistle, the concept that God loves the person with limited knowledge as well as the person with clear insight. With Paul, as long as one loves God—in spite of deficiency in aptitude—this person is acceptable to God. The "intent of the heart" does play an important role in deciding who is and who is not acceptable to God. Paul further demonstrates the principle of love and relationship in the following comments about idols and one's belief system:

So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth

⁷ So as to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but we must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

(as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. But not everyone knows this. (1 Corinthians 8:4-7a)

THE ROMAN CHURCH

To set the stage for sounder principles of hermeneutics, a brief reflection upon Romans 14 and 15 should shed further light on how Paul reacted toward those whose knowledge was deficient. In these two chapters, Paul deals with those who wanted to make exact interpretation the criterion by which one determines one’s faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The first four verses of Chapter 14 demonstrate forcefully Paul’s attitude in this matter of reception and rejection. Paul captures this spirit of patience in graphic language in this letter to Rome.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, **for God has accepted him**. Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Paul did not accuse the misinformed as being false prophets/teachers, but rather he rebuked those who passed judgment on those who were mistaken. God can make us stand even with deformity in our knowledge.

DIFFERENTIATION OF CONCEPTS

This analysis of unity in diversity, not unity in conformity, seeks to eliminate the confusion of certain terms that encourages and promotes division within the Churches of Christ. In not distinguishing between certain terms exercised by the Spirit, many Christians have brought about chaos in the *ekklesia* of God and are hopelessly divided into numerous camps. Part of the problem lies with the failure to differentiate adequately between terms employed by various branches within the Churches of Christ. For example, one’s delinquency in not differentiating between *unity* and *fellowship*, *unity* and *conformity*, *fellowship* and *agreement*, *gospel* and *doctrine*, *as well as fellowship* and *endorsement* has contributed to a proliferation of sects within the Churches of Christ. Thus, when we do not make proper applications of the various phrases employed among many Christians, then this lack of proper differentiation contributes to an abuse of the phrase “false prophets.”

By distinguishing between specific key phrases adopted by many, this clarification of understanding will help us to clear away the underbrush that prevents Christians from properly interpreting the Word of God correctly. By eliminating certain presuppositions, we can approach the text without a lot of excess baggage. The following scenario is a brief analysis of the various clichés employed by many well-meaning Christians to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. This introduction seeks to awaken within every individual a correct understanding of the numerous rigid formulas in order to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Unity and Fellowship

Some leaders within the Churches of Christ do not make a distinction between *unity* and *fellowship*. According to some Christians, unity is founded upon fellowship of agreement, not unity created by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians advocate that the unity of the Spirit is as a result of fellowship with other believers in the same interpretative community,⁸ but this philosophy is not biblical.⁹ Unity is that which the Holy Spirit creates, not man. It is the Spirit's unity.¹⁰ In fact, Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the **unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). In other words, Paul says, "spare no effort." To what end? Not to produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to keep the unity. This unity is already in existence. It is unity of all those who believe and respond to the message of redemption expounded in chapters 1—3 of Ephesians. In other words, fellowship is a fruit of unity, not unity a fruit of fellowship. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) is therefore right when he says,

The Spirit introduces all of the obedient believers into one body and thus forms an active fellowship of all who respond to the Good News. He does this without regard for nation or social distinctions. He generates a vital unity of all who are regenerated.¹¹

Unity and Conformity

Again, we must differentiate between *unity* and *conformity*. Within the Christian community, we have sought to base a superstructure of religion upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge and wisdom. The traditional concept of unity is based upon conformity in knowledge and wisdom.¹² But, it goes almost without saying that conformity in the absolute demands equal ability of perception, simultaneous arrival at perfection in knowledge, and universality of wisdom. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) drove home this point extremely well when he penned:

It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those

⁸Interpretative communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumption." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). I have chosen to use "interpretative community" rather than "interpretive community" as employed by Fish.

⁹ For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Dallas Burdette, "The 'Is' and 'Is Not' of Fellowship," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 10 (December 1973): 194-196.

¹⁰ See Dallas Burdette, "The Spirit Makes Us One," *Restoration Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1974): 276-277.

¹¹ Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (July 1963): 3 [99]. To access all of the issues of *Mission Messenger* [On-Line], go to: www.unity-in-diversity.org

¹² For an insightful article on unity, see Leroy Garrett, "Unity is God's Gift," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 8 (October 1973): 150-152. See also Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 1-16.

who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.¹³

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not external organizational unity. This unity is the unity of persons. It is a fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all those who believe. This means that the unity in the *ekklesia* of God involves this fellowship of being. When we are born again, born of the Spirit, or becomes a partaker of the divine nature, we share in this unity for which Jesus prayed. Paul calls us into the fellowship of God's family through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There can be no unity at all in our Lord's sense apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit who creates within every believer this new nature. Paul wrote: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jürgen Moltmann (born 1926) once said with his typical pungency:

The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with unanimity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented, or forced into conformity with conditions prevailing in the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps. This unity is an evangelical unity, not a legal one.¹⁴

Fellowship and Agreement

Another concept that divides many within the Churches of Christ is that some do not make a distinction between the terms *fellowship* and *agreement*. In many camps, if there is not total agreement, then there is no fellowship. Leaders and members throughout Churches of Christ are now realizing that fellowship does not come as a result of our agreement upon matters of opinion and interpretation, but rather our ability to reach agreement upon doctrinal issues comes as a result of fellowship. **We are not one in opinion; we are one in Christ.** We do not become children of God through study, through acquisition of knowledge, through learning of the law, or through our skill as teachers but through procreation not education. Ketcherside is quite correct in observing:

As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven at all.¹⁵

¹³ Alexander Campbell, "Millennium—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (Monday, April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

¹⁴ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 343.

¹⁵ Carl Ketcherside, "Contrary to Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 4.

Gospel and Doctrine

We must also discriminate between *gospel* and *doctrine*, a separation drawn by the writers of the New Testament. There is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that one eats after he or she is born. Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between Gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the Gospel brought us into being while the doctrine was essential to our growth and well-being; Paul did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion.¹⁶ When we confuse chastisement of a child with conception and cannot distinguish between correction and conception, we are in a sad predicament.¹⁷

Fellowship and Endorsement

Once more, we must distinguish between *fellowship* and *endorsement*, which is one of the major problems within the Churches of Christ. Many are under the impression that to have fellowship with others is to endorse whatever the other person believes, which cannot be true. We are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to believe that God endorses everything we believe or do? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). Again, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). But still, someone may ask, "Are we in fellowship with error?" No, we are in fellowship with individuals. The question posed by many is: "Are we in fellowship with brothers in error?" Our response must be "yes," because that is the only kind of brothers and sisters we know about. As Alexander Campbell has made clear:

So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union, was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. . . . But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Dallas Burdette, "Restoring the Biblical Ideal of Preaching" in *Restoration Forum VIII* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1990), 147-155.

¹⁷ See Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 1-11. I am indebted to Ketcherside for assisting me in a clearer understanding of the distinction between gospel and doctrine.

¹⁸ Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *The Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 176, 177.

OBJECTIVES IN THIS STUDY

Since all Christians are under a mandate to “Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2), then it is imperative that we work toward making “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (4:3). It is my objective to assist leaders and members within the Churches of Christ to spell out the Word of God more completely and to increase their skill in teaching others how to read the Scriptures more effectively. My highest mission is to encourage oneness among God’s family. My hypothesis is that when Christians are taught how to read the Word of God from a narrative as well as from a literary viewpoint, then we will arrive much sooner at fulfilling Jesus’ prayer for unity among God’s people.

CONCLUSION

My emphasis in this in-depth study is to call attention to the “unity of the Spirit” that we are to strive to uphold. Since we are to preserve this harmony of the Spirit, then we need to reexamine a number of clichés to help clear away the underbrush or cobwebs in our thinking so that we do not violate Holy Scripture. In the course of writing this volume, I have sought to assist God’s people in eradicating fuzzy understanding with the aim of bringing about an answer to Christ’s priestly prayer for unity (John 17).

This research explored the utter impossibility of making absolute perfection in knowledge the condition of salvation and fellowship. Since many Christians within the Churches of Christ advance unblemished perfection in knowledge of one’s party beliefs before they can extend the right hand of fellowship, Paul was called upon to see if this current philosophy is what he taught before he extended friendly intercourse to other devoted saints. To refute faultlessness in knowledge as a prerequisite for association, this examination of unity in diversity analyzed two congregations (Corinth and Rome) in which differences existed in order to determine from a biblical perspective the mindset to be exercised by us in similar circumstances today. In spite of disagreements within these two congregations, Paul called for forbearance, not ostracism.

This in-depth study is not designed to question the sincerity of those who disagree with the findings of this essay. These individuals, too, are seeking to be true to the Word of God. The design of this examination is to encourage individuals to become “*peacemakers*,” not “*piecemakers*.” In other words, we are to promote peace and harmony, not to fracture the Body of Christ into warring factions. If we are to restore unity among God’s people, we must recapture the concepts set forth in the Book of Romans, the Book of Galatians, and the Book of Ephesians. An understanding of “imputed” righteousness is the beginning point of restoring the Spirit’s unity among God’s people (see Romans 4). As a follow-up to this study, I recommend my next study, “My Pilgrimage of Faith” for a more in-depth investigation into the abuse of Scripture by many sincere believers.