

“UNITY, NOT UNIFORMITY!”
By Rom A. Pegram (2/4/18)

Tonto and the Lone Ranger were riding through a canyon together when all of a sudden both sides of the canyon were filled with Indian warriors on horses, dressed for battle. The Lone Ranger turned to Tonto and asked, “What are we going to do?” Tonto’s reply? “What you mean ‘we,’ [Kemosabe]?” (*In Search of Unity, Edward Dobson, pp. 20-27*)

Well, not very ‘politically correct,’ but you get the picture. It’s when we go through the very difficult times of life that we find out who’s on our side ... and who’s not; it’s when we find out if there’s true ‘unity’ amongst those we connect to...

A key element of being ready for worship as the Body of Christ—that Holy Temple God is forming us into—is the idea of *biblical unity*. And LOVE, folks, is what binds us together—love for God, first, but then love for each other as well. The Apostle Paul is encouraging his church in Ephesus (that Timothy will eventually pastor for him) to be unified in all they do; in other words, BE THE BODY OF CHRIST! Don’t just give it lip service, but live it—especially in the way you worship. Listen carefully (Eph. 4:1-6, NLT):

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God. ² Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.

³ Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace. ⁴ For there is one body and one Spirit, just as you have been called to one glorious hope for the future. ⁵ There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ and one God and Father, who is over all and in all and living through all.

One of my fondest memories of growing up was traveling—about every other summer—to see our relatives in North Carolina. Because they had the most room at their house, we always stayed at my mother’s parents. My grandfather was a ‘huge’ man—in many ways. Instead of calling him ‘grandfather’ or ‘granddaddy,’ as is typical down south, we always referred to him as ‘Fat Daddy.’ He was physically a very large man—over 6’ tall and a good 200+ pounds. And everyone loved D.J. Welborn—though in different ways...

I’ll never forget arriving at his place, usually very late at night. Grandmother and ‘Fat Daddy’ were always up to greet us—having everything in the house ready for us just to fall into bed once we got our ‘stuff’ inside. This, of course, only happened after everyone was sufficiently greeted...

My mom, being his daughter, was usually the first to get a great big hug. He’d call her ‘Sweetheart’ or something along those lines. Then, he’d greet my two sisters, using special nicknames of course. Then came the boys. After hugging all the girls, he’d give us boys a hug, too—especially my younger brother Stan, who was absolutely adorable as the youngest in the family. Everyone called him ‘Buckshot’ by this time, including my grandfather, because he was never in any one place too long. Finally, my grandfather

would usually give a great big handshake to my dad, and Dad would affectionately greet him by saying, “Hello, Big Boy,” as he called him... Those are quiet the memories.

Everyone loved my grandfather. We were all on the same page with that. But, each and every one of us greeted him in a little different way ... usually having to do with our personal relationship with him, where it was at, what kind of relationship it happened to be, etc.

Do you know that it’s the same when we come together as a church family ... to worship? We come into this place to greet our Heavenly Father, but we all have a bit of a different relationship with Him. So, naturally, we greet Him (worship Him) in different ways ... and I’m here to say today: THAT’S O.K.! And I want all of you to know that...

Sometimes, in the life of the church, there’re some who seem to think that...

- If we’re all ‘Methodists’ or...
- If we’re all from ‘Wisconsin’ or...
- If we’re all basically from the same socio-economic background ... then we should all act in similar ways in everything we do ... *including worship!*

Today, I want to make a very important distinction. It’s important, because it’ll help us grow to be the Holy Temple God so deeply desires for us to be. But before I make that distinction, let me ask this:

IS IT ALWAYS NECESSARY FOR EVERYONE IN A CORPORATE WORSHIP
SETTING TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES PRECISELY THE SAME AS THE PERSON
ON EITHER SIDE OF THEM?

There are those who would say ‘yes’ ... and they usually have very noble reasons for desiring that, like ... *unity in the body*. That’s a good reason. Unity, as we’ve already seen, should be one of the highest priorities in the Church. However, everyone acting in exactly the same way in worship doesn’t necessarily add up to ... *unity*. More accurately, we would call that ... *uniformity*. So, here’s what you need to know today:

UNIFORMITY IS NOT WHAT GOD’S WORD COMMANDS! Now, please understand there should be a ‘corporateness’ to corporate worship. There are places in scripture where leaders tell the people to stand or to kneel or to sing together. And, such experiences can be very meaningful and even *unifying*...

Some time ago, there was a pastor whose church had gone through a major transition in worship styles. The church moved from a very traditional to a very contemporary style of worship. They hired a worship leader from a different tradition than theirs. The new worship leader brought along some friends to help in the transition. One of the friends was extremely demonstrative in worship, sitting right in the front pew for the first of the new services—an ‘over-the-top’ kind of an individual. Her arms waving and liturgical dancing shocked many folks in that church. It was quite different from anything they’d

experienced before. Though the pastor wanted to move ahead in new worship forms, *this* was a bit too much ... too quickly. And some people became openly rebellious as a result. A part of the issue was that *this woman drew way too much attention to herself*, which kind of nixed the whole idea of worshiping/focusing on God.

Now, to set the record straight, in some churches this woman's expressiveness would not have been out of place. It would've been the norm. The Bible actually mentions many forms of worship that are O.K., but wouldn't necessarily go over in every congregation today.

Folks, because the Bible mentions them favorably, these forms of worship are presumably O.K. with God ... yet God's word *does not* demand all of these in every service ... everywhere. Does that make sense? Let me put it this way: Though UNITY in worship is a high & noble goal, the Bible does not say that group/corporate worship must always be expressed in a UNIFORM way! God has created us all to be different, and ... we all have a different relationship with God, so a different approach to God. Folks, UNIFORMITY is *not* what God's word demands; instead...

UNITY IS WHAT GOD'S WORD COMMANDS! Forgive me for using an already overused story this morning, but I've never found a better one to make this point. The story goes like this...

There were two gentlemen that had just met and began talking to each other. One being fairly religious, he began to wonder about the other and if they might find any common ground at all. So, he begins to ask his new acquaintance...

"Are you religious ... or are you an atheist?" He said, "I'm religious."

"Me, too!" he told him. "Are you a Christian or some other religion?" "I'm a Christian."

"Me, too! Are you a Catholic or a Protestant?" His friend said, "Protestant."

When the first man said, "Me, too!" there was a faint glimmer of hope in his eyes. "What denomination?" the first man asked.

"Presbycostalist." (I took the safe way out...) "Wow! Me, too!," the first guy said. "Are you Fundamentalist Presbycostalist or Conservative Presbycostalist?"

"Conservative Presbycostalist," he responded, and this time he was really smiling when he said it.

"Really? Me, too! Conservative Presbycostalist Church of God or Conservative Presbycostalist Church of the Lord?" He said, "Conservative Presbycostalist Church of God!"

The first man could hardly believe it. He nearly shouted, “Me, too!” Then wondering how far he should press his luck, he continued, “Are you Original Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God, or are you Reformed Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God?”

His friends smile broadened as he replied, “Reformed Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God.”

“This is amazing,” the first man replied. “Me, too! Are you Reformed Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God, Reformation of 1884 ... or Reformed Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God, Reformation of 1912?”

Elated, his new friend responded, “Reformed Conservative Presbycotalist Church of God ... Reformation of 1912!”

The first man’s eyes widened and he gasped! Then, as lunged at the other man, he cried, “Die, you heretic!”

Someone recently said that the first true miracle in the Book of Acts is found in Acts 2:1 (KJV) ... where it talks about the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came down on the new Church ... and they were all gathered ‘in one accord.’ In other words, there was UNITY!

- The problem is, UNITY shouldn’t be considered a miracle!
- We shouldn’t be so surprised when the Church experiences true biblical UNITY!
- From a biblical perspective, UNITY SHOULD BE THE NORM!

(As my Holy Land Guide/good friend Malcolm Cartier would tell us, the congregation in Acts 2 were all in the very first car commercial in the history of our world—a Honda commercial. ‘They were all there in one accord....’)

Folks, I hope you get the idea today. Sometimes, we get these two things—unity and uniformity—a little mixed up. But, God’s made us all different. Each one of us has a bit different relationship with God ... and we have our unique ways of expressing ourselves within that relationship—not better or worse, just different. Do we understand this? And how’s that going to help us worship together in the future?

To be the Holy Temple God is building us into ... *we need to make UNITY, not UNIFORMITY, a priority!* Folks, we need to come to recognize how awful *disunity* is; it’s *not* of God! Then, we need to love God and one another in such a way that we’ll be a great example of what Paul had in mind when he spoke to his church in Ephesus (v. 3): “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.” Let’s do that. Let’s be that kind of Church!