

"Pure and Peaceable" Part 2

Christian Liberty

Galatians 2:11-14 and Acts 9, 11, 15

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Ted: The Lord be with you.

Men: And also with you.

Ted: Let us pray. O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace, give us grace, seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions. Take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union in concord, that as there is but one body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we all may be of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth in peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify You through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Ted: Is this coming across a little loudly? Is it?

Participant: The acoustics aren't good here, Ted, so you need to speak naturally.

Ted: Speak naturally. Okay.

Participant: It sounds like the voice of God.

Ted: It sounds like the voice of God; that's correct. Speak softly and carry a large Bible. *(Laughter.)*

You know what? Just a word before I get started, because I'm going to go back and try to finish up what I had taught about a month ago on "Pure and Peaceable." "Wisdom that is from above," says James, "is pure and peaceable." And I want to kind of pull some things out of Galatians 1 and 2.

You know, it's always very intimidating for me. I come before you and teach in fear and trembling because we have Bruce. And Bruce not only has great Biblical knowledge. Are there those who have greater knowledge and understanding than he does? Yes, there are. I mean, sometimes he says some things that I know are not quite right, maybe historically or whatever. But he has great knowledge. But more than that, he has something I don't have, and that is single-mindedness, integrity and humility. I can't ever hope in a lifetime to match, to come even one tenth, to where that man is in terms of his inner character. And that's what gives his teaching power, because he speaks as one with authority.

So I think that any of us who come up here already come up seriously handicapped because of who Bruce is. And Bruce lives out what he tells us about ministry. And that is that ministry is—

Participant: Who you are, where you are.

Ted: Who you are, where you are. That ought to be emblazoned into your heart. Ministry is who you are, where you are. And that's what Bruce does.

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So with that in mind, let's look at Galatians the first chapter, and I'm just going to read this section. Starting at verse 11:11--and then pick up on that just as a summary. We've gone over this several times and I apologize if it seems redundant.

Paul writes in Galatians 1:11, *"For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently, and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.*

"But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who had called me by His grace was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. But I went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus.

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas"—that is, Peter—"and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. And what I am writing to you before god, I do not lie.

"Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only were hearing it said, 'He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.' And they glorified God because of me.

"Then after fifteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation an set before them—though privately, before those who seemed influential—the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so they might bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who seemed to be influential—(what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those I say who seemed influential added nothing to me. On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised, for He who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles. And when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

"But when Cephas, (that is, Peter), came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

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"But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" This is the word of the Lord.

Men: Thanks be to God.

Ted: A long reading. And Paul tends to ramble a bit, as you can see—very, very long sentences with lots of clauses inserted. But you take all that we just read. And what I want to try to do, which is what I was trying to do the last time I taught, is to take parts from Galatians 1 and 2 and make sense of them, as compared to Acts 9, 11 and 15.

And in this I see three visits by Paul to Jerusalem. And at one point Bruce and I differ on our understanding of the connection of Galatians with Acts. It's no big deal' we just come to different conclusions. And within the evangelical community of scholars and theologians, both understandings can be argued. One side, of course, believes that they're right, and the other side believes they're right.

But nonetheless, I believe that the second visit of Paul to Jerusalem fits with Acts 11 and not Galatians 2. Bruce believes that Acts 15 and Galatians 2 go together. But nonetheless, let me just walk you through this. And you have your notes.

Paul made his first visit to Jerusalem as found in Acts 9. And Barnabas said that he brought Paul to the apostles and declared what Paul had been doing. So Paul is for the first time being introduced to the apostles, perhaps face to face or just by word or communication at that meeting. And Barnabas had to explain that Paul had seen Jesus, spoken to Jesus and preached Jesus boldly.

But nothing is given in Acts 9 about the content of the gospel that Paul was preaching, as he stood before them in the company of the apostles. So this was the first meeting. And remember, this was a man who had severely persecuted the church. So the apostles and the church at Jerusalem had great concerns about this Paul and had to be convinced that he was the real thing.

So in that first visit in Acts 9, Barnabas stands up and speaks about Paul and what he has done and what he has seen. He has seen Jesus. He has spoken to him. And he has been preaching Jesus boldly.

Now I think that when I was with you last time, I gave you something that looked like this.

Transcriber's Note: A diagram.

Ted: And it was printed on both sides. So with everything I'm going through here, I've tried not to repeat this, because this was just a huge diagram that went on two pages, and we'd get bogged down in that today. So I'm taking that knowledge for granted. If you missed that episode, what I taught, you can get it for a love offering of \$19.99.

(Laughter.) It also comes with a special prayer shawl guaranteed, too. *(Laughter.)* It will heal you of all your ills and aches and pains, and make your wife the woman you wanted her to be. *(Laughter.)* When laid upon her. *(Laughter.)* You can order a bunch of them. *(Laughter.)*

So that was the first visit. Now we have the second visit that I believe happened. And it compares with Acts 11. And the purpose of that visit was to deliver famine relief. Agabus, a prophet, said that there would be a great famine in Jerusalem. And the church

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leaders throughout the world at that time went around and made a collection. Paul took part in making a monetary collection, and he brought it to Jerusalem to care for the saints for the believers in Jerusalem. So it was for the purpose of delivering famine relief. It was also, as it turned out, for a private conversation with James, Peter and John. And Paul says, *"so not as to run in vain."* That means all the things he was doing and preaching. He wanted to pacify the apostles to be sure that he had not done what was *kenos* in Greek. That means empty or worthless, empty or vain. Paul set before them, *"though privately before those who seemed influential,"* the gospel that he proclaimed among the Gentiles. So he not only had a private conversation and brought famine relief. But he also talked to them about what he was talking about and what he was doing.

He also was there in that second visit to combat false brothers. They did not yield in submission. Paul and Barnabas and the others did not yield in submission even for a moment. These false brothers were saying that you not only need faith and trust in Jesus Christ to be saved, but you also need to follow the Jewish law. And Paul writes, *"When the apostles perceived the grace that was given me, they gave Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles."*

Once again, in the second visit, we really don't hear about the content of Paul's gospel that he was preaching at that time. So this is followed almost immediately by what Bruce called a relapse of Peter's faith and trust that salvation came through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and that there was nothing you could humanly add to that.

So Bruce calls that a relapse. I don't think that's a relapse. I think that's a lack of understanding on Peter's part. He did not really understand all the implications of the gospel at this time. It's one thing to understand it and then to say, "Well, you know, I really don't believe that," or maybe this or that and fall back from that. I don't believe that's what happened to Peter. I believe that he just didn't get the whole picture.

And we read about that in Galatians 2:11-14. And I kind of summarized it there and compressed it a bit as you can see in your notes.

"When Peter came to Antioch, I" (Paul) "opposed him to his face. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party." That means that party or group within the church that said that you needed to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law in order to be saved, as well as putting your faith in the Messiah Jesus.

So when Paul came, Peter had been eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party, so that even Barnabas was led astray.

So Peter was saying, "Wait a second. This is going too far. This salvation by grace alone through faith alone, this is going too far. I mean, we have to have a role in this. We have to be doing our part." And Barnabas begins to listen to him. He says, "You know, I think Peter may have a point there. I mean, we can't just be irresponsible, right? So we've got to be able to add something to this." And I'm actually imposing a lot of my own understanding at this point. You'll have to forgive me. But nonetheless, I think that's probably how the conversation went.

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"But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel," (which is salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone), *"I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?'"* "Pettier, come on! You're provoking us by the thought that we need to add something to God's grace. And yet you are actually fellowshipping and living with Gentiles who don't add anything to that. So how can you turn around and act differently just because you have this other group that comes in and exerts a lot of pressure on you?"

And that's a good question. I believe that Peter did this not because he had a full grasp of the gospel, but because he had only a partial grasp of the gospel. And instead, he was responding to his lack of understanding of how it all fit together. He had probably not sorted it out in his own mind.

Now we shouldn't find that surprising, because in my conversations with a number of you who have been coming to Bruce's teaching year after year after year, and his teaching on the sovereignty of God, on predestination, on election, on all those subjects, you still talk as if you don't believe that, although you will sit and talk to me and say, "Oh, Bruce, he's right on target. I buy all that." But when you get into conversations that are not immediately tied in with those doctrines, you start to sound like somebody who doesn't believe those doctrines. It takes time to get it!

And I want to talk about that a little more. This is so important! Mind you, I'm not being critical of any of you, because it has taken me so long to get so many things. I mean, I knew that even when I was active in Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship in college, and evangelizing and talking to people, I talked to people as if those people contributed to their salvation by what? Their sincerity, their choice. I mean, Bruce has told us that no one is saved by making a decision. I talked like that. But in the back of my mind, I knew it wasn't true. But I continued to talk like that because I hadn't fit all the parts together. God hadn't, by His grace, fit all the parts together.

Do you understand what I'm saying at this point? It just takes time. This gospel is so rich and so deep and so involved and so interconnected. The more you study, it's like everything starts to dovetail with one another and it's hard to grasp it. And there is so much of the flesh within us.

So I see that as the second visit. The result of the second visit is that although Peter and James and the others said, "Well, we see the grace of God. God is working in you," just like Peter had seen that the Holy Spirit was given to Cornelius—and I think that was Acts 10—"so therefore we extend to you the hand of fellowship, Paul. With the first visit we had our doubts. We've heard more. We've learned more. Now we extend our hand to you." But we don't know if Peter had done any approving of what Paul was actually teaching. Did he actually get it?

So we come to the third visit—Acts 15. The question then becomes very clear. We can clearly see what the issue of the message is here, because the question that was asked in the third Jerusalem visit. Paul came down from Antioch with a question. Can you be saved if you are not circumcised?? And the apostles and the elders and the church in Jerusalem met together and they consulted together. And they came out with a decision. *"We believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."* I mean,

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that's a very clear, specific statement. It doesn't have anything to do with anything that we add to the mix.

So those are the three visits I see happening. I see them happening in progression. I see Paul's message being more clearly understood and the church responding to it, so that by chapter 15 we have the apostles and elders and the whole church saying that they are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. And they don't add the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ plus something else. They don't say that in Acts 15. They just say that it's by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So, taking these three visits, I think #2, as you see there, what I'm pulling out of this is *the impossible and amazing gospel that Paul had received*. And this is the gospel. I mean, he does it very well. It's in Galatians 2:16. I think it's shortly after where I stopped reading, where Paul opposes Peter.

And in that it says, *"We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law."*

Wait a second, Paul! You just said that. Why are you repeating yourself? It's because it's so important! And it was the thing that had confused Peter and many in the church, so that there was even a group in the church, the circumcision party, which said, "No, that's not true! You need something extra!"

So Paul says, *"We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. So we also have believed in Christ Jesus."* "That's the way we believe, guys. Now let me repeat myself." *"In order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."*

And those who think otherwise and think that they add something to it, in conversations I've had, for instance, with Muslims and with Mormons, I say, when they tell me that they're adding to what Christ has done, I say, "How are you doing? How well are you doing?"

"Well, I'm doing pretty good. I mean, I'm trusting in Christ, but I'm also adding my part."

And when I say, "How are you doing?", they say, "Pretty good." And then I say, "Well, the problem is, do you know what God's standard is?" Did Christ say, "You must be pretty good, even as My heavenly Father is pretty good?" (*Laughter.*) No. It says, *"You must be perfect, as My heavenly Father is perfect."*

You must be perfect! That ought to cause you to despair. And that despair ought to lead you to God. Or, if you've not been regenerated, that despair will lead you to make excuses and to lie to yourself and to lie to others about how far and how well you're doing.

So I think it's great when you despair when you hear about the sovereign perfection and holiness of God. That's a great thing, because it forces you to Christ, because He has the only solution to that.

So I just want to emphasize in this item #2, that this gospel that Paul preached, and the way he pulled it together in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians,

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Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and if I've forgotten any other letters, forgive me for that.

But that is an amazing interpretation and unwrapping of all of what Jesus said, because if you look at the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—the gospel message is in parts. And Paul pulls it all together in an unbelievable way.

We get in the Gospels that Jesus is the Messiah. That's clear. We get in the Gospels that Jesus is the Son of God. *"And who do you say that I am?"*

"You are the Christ"—the Messiah—*"the Son of the living God."* Okay, we get that part. We get the part about Jesus being the atonement for sin. John the Baptist: *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* We also get the fact that Jesus says at the Last Supper that He gives His life as *"a ransom for many."* And so all these parts—the Christ, the Son of God, a ransom for many, the Atonement, these doctrines—they're not pulled together in the Gospels.

But Paul pulls them all together. And not only does he pull them all together so they all fit. I'm not saying that you can't get this from the Gospels. But I'm saying that Paul does an unbelievable job. And into that, he puts all of that into the doctrine of being in union with Christ. So all of the things of Christ get put into us when we're put into Him and He is in us.

There's nothing like that any place else in all the religions and the philosophies of the world. And Paul gets this, and he's writing these letters not but what? Maybe twenty-five years after he's converted. So within twenty-five years, it has all come together—everything that we stake our hopes and dreams and aspirations on, anything we hope to be in life. It's all tied down within twenty-five years of his conversion. I mean, that is extraordinary!

One thing that makes me believe that the Gospels are true is that this whole way of understanding reality—who I am, who God is, who others are—that whole thing is pulled together so tightly that it has withstood the test of two thousand years and still converts people today and makes them new people.

We can't underestimate how powerful that was, because it was up against a system, the only other system the world has. And that system is that you are made right with what? The universe, or with God, or whatever you care to call it—with heaven—you are made right based on how well you perform. That is the default position of the world. Self-justification by works is the default understanding of unregenerate man. Before you become born again, that's all you understand. You don't have any other understanding.

Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 2:14. *"The natural man, - that is, the man who has not been born again of God—'does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him. And he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.'"*

He is not able to understand them. We get angry with people who have not been regenerated, and they are not able. Why do we get upset with them? Why do we get upset with the politicians? And why do we get upset with church leaders if they are not able? They are simply not able to do it. We ought not to get angry, but rather to say, "Lord, have

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mercy on me, a sinner, and on them, sinners." Yes? The microphone. Bill thought he could take a nap here. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: To your point about the Gospels being clear in the life of Christ and what we glean from that, and then Paul pulling it all together.

Ted: Right.

Participant: Help me clarify this. Doesn't it seem that The Acts of the Apostles is more of a development of what happened and how the church was formed, as well as tidbits. I mean, the Acts tells us a lot of things that Galatians and Ephesians don't, in terms of what happened in the background.

Ted: Right. That's good.

Participant: But the whole point, I'm thinking now from what you're teaching, is that there is no letter in the New Testament that says, "Here's Paul, this great guy. And he wandered through the hills, and he went to this person and did that." It's Christ. I mean, there's no letter in the New Testament, aside from maybe The Acts of the Apostles, that really treats Paul or any of the disciples like Christ, where they give a little biography, or a little autobiography, and they hold them up as someone to be followed and listened to, right?

Ted: Oh, I get you. That's right.

Participant: These epistles—I guess I'm just trying to clarify in my own mind how exact your point is, that the epistles really tell the gospel.

Ted: Right. The Epistles take what the Gospels record as the words, actions and teachings of Jesus. And the Epistles make sense of it all, pulling it all together. Bishop Rodgers' brow is furrowed a bit. (*Laughter.*) Is that too exact of a difference, Bishop?

Bishop Rodgers: I was just thinking of 1 Corinthians 15:1-10. It's probably the earliest written account of the gospel that Paul summarizes. But he says that he received this, not just from Jesus but also from the other apostles who had gotten that together too. So I think that Peter was also being hypocritical. It wasn't just that he didn't understand.

Ted: Right.

Bishop Rodgers: But he did understand it enough not to eat with the fellows until the pressure came from the guys in Jerusalem.

Ted: Right.

Bishop Rodgers: So it's a little bit more complicated.

Ted: But to me, the thing is that if you don't have the right understanding, the hypocrisy will follow because the hypocrisy is a way of covering up for what you can't produce. I think that all goes together.

I'm not going to get through it again, guys. Let me just keep rolling, if you don't mind.

#3. To me, then, this shows that *the church's understanding is often behind the curve of God's revelation*. You know, we need to think about this. We expect the church to get up to speed on what God is revealing. And they didn't get up to speed right away on what Paul was revealing.

But I'm thinking about even the Nicene Creed, when the three hundred and some bishops throughout the world assembled in Nicea in Asia Minor. And they began to deal with the teaching that Jesus was not fully God and that you had to in some way earn your

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salvation. So when they wrote the words "we believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God"—that means that Jesus was God coming from God—"Light from Light"—light coming from light—"true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father, through Whom all things were made, who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven."

When we deal with those words, what we need to realize is that, based on the best historical research that is done, that when those bishops showed up for that council in Nicea, one-third believed what I just read to you—"God from God, Light from Light, begotten, not made." One-third believed the other side—that Jesus was not of the same substance as the Father. He was of like substance. He wasn't quite the same thing as God. And one-third didn't know what they believed.

So I'm just saying that when these bishops got together and argued this question, by 325 A.D., don't you think they'd get it by then? Well no, they didn't get it. In fact, the church didn't get it for quite a while. And the history of the persistence of the belief that Jesus is not truly God stays with the church for several more hundred years. They finally threw out those who did not believe that Jesus was completely God, that He was less than God. They actually got thrown out of the Empire.

Unfortunately, they went into the German tribes and they converted the German tribes. And then when the German tribes invaded the Roman Empire, they brought all this awful teaching right back into it. And there was a time that the leadership in the Roman Empire in the 500s was believing that Jesus was less than God. It took a while to get that right.

Also, I think about archbishop Thomas Cranmer who wrote the Book of Common Prayer. He didn't get it for a while. He started off by hearing the Reformers' teaching in Strasburg in 1531. But he doesn't really get around to thinking about the Reformed faith for another sixteen years. It takes him a while to get it.

I think about the Pentecostal revival that took place in 1900—the things that we receive, the emphasis and teaching on the Holy Spirit. I think there are some bad things that came out, some bad teaching that came out of that. But that didn't hit the mainline churches for another sixty years. Then all of a sudden, they are no longer fire breathing, Bible banging, snake handling Pentecostals. They are respectable Charismatics. But what happens is, in the course of time, they begin, because of the early teaching, we say, "Yes. We've not emphasized the Holy Spirit enough."

So even in my own church, in our Anglican church, there's a tremendous witness that needs to be done for the Reformed faith. I think that too many times many of the brethren in our church are too Arminian in the sense that man has to contribute something in some way to his salvation by his decision, or whatever.

What do you do while waiting for the church to catch up with God's revelation? What do you do during that time? First of all, you've got to believe that *unity is essential*. Truth ranks first. And Bruce is quick to point this out. He's absolutely right. The truth of the gospel ranks first. But unity is not far behind. So listen to this.

Unity amongst Christians, when Christians are in union with one another—and we think it's important and we strive for unity—this reflects the unity of the three Persons of the Trinity—Holy Spirit, Father and Son are all in agreement and They work together. So

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They are in unity. That sets the example for us as Christians. If the Persons of the Trinity work in perfect unity, that's what we ought to be aiming for as well.

In John 17:21 Jesus prayed *"that they may all be one," "that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them even as You loved Me."* So what Jesus is saying is that if we are one, then the world will know "that You, the Father, sent Me and loved them"—that is, the world—"even as You loved me." Jesus is making this point about the unity.

In Psalm 133, *"Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity."* 2 Corinthians 13:11: *"Finally brothers, rejoice. Aim at the restoration."* That means perfection. *"Comfort one another. Agree with one another."* And the Greek means "be of the same mind." *"Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you."*

Ephesians 4:1-6. *"I urge you to bear with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*

And finally in 1 Peter. *"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind."* So we need to believe that unity is very, very important, not only because it reflects the Trinity, but it also reflects what Paul has urged on us and what Jesus prayed for.

My concern is that churches, for the most part, don't think about this. It's not even on their radar screen. They don't think about what we can do to be in greater unity with the whole body of Christ. They are completely concerned with what's going on in their own congregations. And they actually take pride in calling themselves independent, which to me means independent of something. What are you independent of? You are independent of what?

"Denominations."

Oh, those bad denominations! But think about this. Denominations are at least an attempt at getting unity. Independent churches are no attempt at unity. They are making themselves independent of other denominations, or of the body of Christ in general.

I believe that in the future we'll look back and see that this was one of the great blind spots of the church. I think we can argue and discuss how this is actually accomplished. But brothers, we have to think it's important! We just can't say, "It's not important." And because we want to go off and do our own thing, or whatever reason it is, whether we don't like the way the preacher preaches, or whatever.

I mean, as I think I shared with you, I interviewed for a job at a Free Methodist college. And I was required to read all the Free Methodist history and documentation of how that church got started in the 1870s. Today I cannot tell you why people are Free Methodists versus regular Methodists, or whatever other kinds of Methodists there may be. I don't know what caused such a big deal so that they had to break with other brothers.

So the first thing we do is that we've got to believe that unity is essential. The second thing is that we need to make a pledge that *divorce is not an option*. And I don't mean divorce from your spouse. I mean divorce from other brethren, except for Scriptural reasons. I think that unity in marriage and unity in the church are very similar concepts.

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And we are allowed to divorce from spouses if there's infidelity. Certainly, if there is infidelity and false teaching in the church, that is grounds for separating. And also there is the Pauline exception. *"If the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases a brother or a sister is not enslaved; God has called you to peace. For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? How do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"* That's 1 Corinthians 7.

So Paul is basically saying that if that other person just will not get along with you, then let him go. But remember this. You don't know by maintaining that marriage and that unity, you don't know if you will have a chance to get that person saved through your witness and testimony.

And I think that certainly I've pointed out before that Bishop Rodgers with the Episcopal church spent about forty or fifty years in there working when many people said, "Get out! Leave!"

"No, there's still a witness. I don't know whether I'll be a part of the salvation or the turnaround of that church." And finally, with certain actions it became impossible to be in fellowship because of infidelity within that church body.

And once again, as I told you the last time I taught, during the sixteenth century Reformation and before, many of the Reformers did not leave the Catholic church. The Catholic church threw them out. They persisted in trying to change things and to move it in the right direction.

Well today the idea is that if you have a revelation, you can go out and start a church. If you are unhappy—maybe not enough Pentecostal or charismatic influence, not enough praise the Lord!, maybe not enough invitations or altar calls, maybe it's time to start your own church.

Last Sunday I had the privilege of preaching in my son's church. It was Westville Baptist Church. And he's great in the Reformed faith. He believes all the doctrines of grace and he's teaching his people that, and it's knocking the socks off of them. They don't know how to take it all in.

Butt we had visitors last Sunday. And they were a couple from Kentucky. They were visiting with family. It's a very small church. Maybe twenty people attended the service. And I went up to the Kentucky couple. I said, "Are you Baptists?"

They said, "Yes."

And I said, "How was the service compared to your service?"

"Oh," they said, "it's very similar, except that we always have an altar call." (*Laughter.*)

And so I didn't know quite what to say. I said, "Well, we're not opposed to them. It's just that we don't want people to get the idea that by walking forward,—you know, some people will walk forward for the right reasons and some people will walk forward for the wrong reasons. And we don't want you to think that just walking forward gets you saved. We don't want people to get into that mindset."

Nonetheless, now finally, in the end, *personal revelation or interpretation must stand up to the scrutiny of Scripture and be accepted by the church.* I tried to share this the last time. Paul could preach this new gospel, this revelation that is unbelievable, that has been

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proved out. But it had to not only stand up to the scrutiny of Scripture. Paul quotes a whole lot of Old Testament to back it up. But it also had to be accepted by the body of Christ. Had his gospel never been accepted by the body of Christ, it would have been its own kind of cult, its own kind of thing. But what the body of Christ found is that this was true. *"I set before them the gospel, in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain."*

Paul thought this was important enough to present to the body that he actually went to the leadership and he said, "Okay. This is what I'm preaching. This is what I'm doing. Does it strike you as the right way? I mean, have I got this right?"

And we always need to ask ourselves that question. We need to take what we teach and what we share to other believers in authority and in knowledge, and find out what they're thinking about. In fact, I spoke to Don on the phone the other day. I wanted to know what he was thinking about it when I told him what I was going to teach. I respect Don. He's a student of the Scriptures.

Or I'll speak to Bishop Rodgers. I'll say, "What do you think? Have I got this wrong? In what way have I missed it?" Bishop Rodgers is often very good to point out, "Ted, you're okay, except that you need to sharpen up this point, or you're going in the wrong direction at this point."

And then in Acts 15, *"it seemed good to the apostles and the elders"*—the whole church—*"both the apostles and the elders having come to one accord, and it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us."* You see again and again and again in Acts 15, those three times it is saying that the church approved of what Paul was doing.

I get very nervous when I see groups go off on their own without authority and without approval. And that is a result of a lack of knowledge, understanding and respect for unity.

I'm going to finish up there. I think I finally got to it. Don, did I get to everything you were talking to me about the other day?

Don: Yes.

Ted: Okay. Any thoughts or questions?

Participant: When you talk about approval in the church, from my perspective—and I don't mean to be arrogant saying it—but are all these divisions a result of arrogance on the part of leadership because we're not coming humbly before God and before His word, really wanting to know His position? I'll just throw it out. We come with a Baptist or this or that position. And we're going to fight for that position. And we're going to make decisions from that position. But have we really honestly gone to the Scripture humbly before God and said, "Is the Baptist position, the Methodist position—"

Ted: Right. Or whatever position, yes. Well, I don't think that it's so much a matter of coming humbly before Scripture. I think that's part of it. But the thing is, an answer that I hear is, "Well, we just need to get back into the Scripture." Well, we can, but look what happens. We sit down and each group kind of forms its own Scriptural arguments. And they come alongside each other and pull out the cannons and blast away at each other.

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I think that is very important. But it is equally important to abide with the other brothers and listen to what they're saying. And give God a chance to work on your understanding of things.

That's why I'm always going to others. And I say, "What does it sound like? What am I sounding like? Have I missed the point? Did I get it right?"

So I think it's two things going on at once. It's examination of the Scriptures—serious, humble examination. But it's also humbly listening to what others have to say. It takes time. Bishop, you were going to say something more?

Bishop Rodgers: I forgot what I was going to say.

Ted: Okay. You see, I'm not proposing any solution here. I'm just saying that the only solution is that we've got to start thinking about it. Okay, Don?

Don: Ted, when Jesus prayed for unity in His high priestly prayer, do you think that He was praying for us on earth, or for the new heavens and the new earth, because it seems like we've been an abysmal failure here.

Ted: Yes, right.

Don: And Jesus never had a prayer that was not answered, or failed to come to pass.

Ted: Don, correct. But if we are in Christ, if we're in union with Christ, we've already been what? Crucified with Him, buried with Him, resurrected with Him, and made to sit in the heavenlies. So, in fact what Jesus prayed for is already a fact. We are seated with Him in unity in the heavenlies.

The whole Christian life is about experiencing. I shouldn't say it's the only thing. But one of the key things is experiencing what Jesus has already achieved, and we've achieved in Him. If we're seated with Him in the heavenlies, in a real way the job is all done, in one way. In another way, we haven't experienced that in this earthly life. I want to experience what Christ has already achieved in me in this life.

And, as I've taught before, you start off here at conversion, and here's Christ's perfection. How far do you get? You don't get very far. But nonetheless, we're always striving toward the goal, as Paul says, forgetting what lies behind and trying to experience more of who Christ is, as a result of what we already are in Him. So I think it works both ways, Don. That's not overly helpful, is it?

Don: Oh yes, very much so.

Ted: Okay.

Participant: Don't we say in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?"

Ted: Right. That's good.

Participant: I was just going to mention that Paul's great passion was to keep the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers united in one church. And that's why, particularly in Galatians, he's so passionate about this as a denial of the gospel, because in the gospel we are one. If you're in the gospel, you are one with people you don't agree with. You are one with them, as long as they're in the gospel.

Ted: Right.

Participant: It's when the teaching is not just different from yours, but when it challenges the gospel itself.

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Ted: Right.

Participant: Then you're not as one, because they're not at one with Christ.

Ted: Amen.

Participant: And of course, that's finally what we had to conclude in the Episcopal church. Some of the teaching now had gotten to the point where it was no longer clear that we were one in Christ. And so then it was a falsehood to keep pretending. And so finally the division came about. But we hope to get that healed. But it will only be healed in the gospel.

Ted: Dale had a comment. Yes, Dale?

Dale: I might help you in this with something from Rudyard Kipling.

Ted: Okay. *(Laughter.)*

Dale: "East is east and west is west

And never the twain shall meet

Till earth and sky stand perfectly

Before God's judgment seat."

Ted: Right. That's correct. We'll never be at total unity until we go into the new heaven and the new earth. But in the same way we're called to love, to be kind-hearted. And all of those things we won't do perfectly until we get to the new heaven and earth.

I mean, I don't know why we insist on holiness, love, kindness. I'm looking at the attributes of God here. I mean, we just go through the attributes of God. I've ticked off a number of them: Spirit, truth, wisdom, immutability, independent, faithful, love, loving-kindness, goodness, long-suffering, mutual compassion, justice, graciousness, holiness, blessedness, jealousy, gloriousness, triple natured, unity. All of those things, all of those attributes make up two-thirds of those attributes. God not only has those attributes, but we're to reflect those here on earth.

Why does unity get left out of the equation? It's like it doesn't even exist as a question. Okay. Sorry.

Participant: Because it's hard.

Ted: Because it's hard? But it's also hard to love others. And it's hard to be just with others. It's hard to be gracious with others. I mean, it's humanly impossible to live the Christian life. We're just not able to do it. Jesus Christ must do it through us. That is our only hope. And that's why I said that I'm glad when you and I despair.

I despair of my life. There's nothing within my natural self that has anything of value or worth. I am self-deceived, wicked, evil, self-interested. And it's only in Jesus that I have any of these godly attributes that God Himself has. Okay, I'm sorry. That was a little sermon. *(Laughter.)* A homily.

Participant: Could you enlighten me on what exactly Acts 15:20, 28 and 29, which is sort of the end of the Jerusalem council's letter? I can read them to you, but—

Ted: What is—

Participant: Well, verse 28 goes back to verse 20, where it says—

Ted: Well, verse 28 says that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on them no greater burden than these requirements: *"that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood, from what has been strangled, and from sexual" relations.*

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"Immorality", I'm sorry. I hope it's not sexual relations. *(Laughter.)* That puts a cramp in my style. *(Laughter.)* *"If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well."* Is that what you meant?

Participant: Yes. And 20. but anyway, that's good. Just enlighten me about those.

Ted: Well, in terms of what they mean, I think basically what the council is saying is yes, that we're saved by grace alone. But in order to keep peace in the church, just don't do things that are going to irritate the Jewish believers. They're still getting it. They're still getting freedom in Christ. They're not there yet. This is kind of looking out for the weaker brothers.

It's kind of like what I said to my son. I said to my son before I preached when I talked to him on the phone, "Do you think it would be okay if I wore a black shirt and a collar?"

And he said, "No." *(Laughter.)* He said, "They'll think you're a Catholic." *(Laughter.)* And if you've ever been in that part of Virginia, where there is nothing but Baptist churches, it's like the Catholics are the folks with the horns and the pitch forks and the forked tail. They think that way.

So do I have the freedom to wear a black shirt and a collar? Yes. You know, I've been given that by the church, and that's our practice. But I'm not going to do it. So I wore a dark suit, I wore a blue shirt and a striped tie. That's what I wore. And it didn't get in the way of anybody hearing what I had to say.

So if you go out preaching and you see blood on the platter, and I go ahead and take that, and in your culture that puts you off, just don't do that. I mean, does that help at all? I mean, those are the things.

Participant: There's a moral side. We've got a moral side there. And I think it's a testimony to the world to life in Christ, that the gospel sets you free to live a certain moral life. It's not an invitation to licentiousness.

Ted: Right.

Participation: And these Gentile Christians are coming out of some pretty undisciplined lives, at least different ethical lives. And they're saying, "The fact that you're not saved by the law doesn't mean that you're indifferent to godly living when you're a Christian."

Ted: Right. You know, the gospel sets us free to serve others. That's what it does. And you've got to humble yourself to do that. And that is very hard, if not impossible, for me to do.

Michael Card had a great song. And it was about Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. Do you know the Christian singer Michael Card? There is brilliant, great theology in his songs. It's contemporary, it's easy to listen to, but it's great.

And what he does is this. Michael Card talks about an image. It's like if I was here with Jim, and I were to wash his feet. "The Basin and the Towel." So Jesus took a basin and a towel, and he washed the disciples' feet. And as He bowed down to wash the disciples' feet, Jesus was forming a bridge from One to the other, from God to man. And so, as you bow down, I form a bridge to you. It's just a powerful image.

Let us pray. Lord God, once again we remember that in Your earthly life You laid hands on people and they were healed. We pray now in this body, in this body of Christ

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that is here, to reach out our hands in the Spirit and touch Bruce. Lay hands on Him and heal Him and deliver Him. As you did in Your earthly life, now do it in Your life in the Spirit. We pray this in Your name. Amen.