
WEAVER BOOKS
BIBLICAL STUDIES
"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet,
and a light unto my path."
PSALM 119:105
Can We All
Just Get Along?
JOHN WEAVER
WEAVER BIBLE COLLEGE

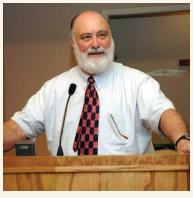
Let all your things be done with charity.

1 CORINTHIANS 16:14

Differences need not become divisions. John Weaver considers Christian love, maturity, the study of Scripture, and the patience required among believers who do not share the same understanding. These messages invite readers to examine the sources of conflict and to pursue fellowship without surrendering the responsibility to seek and obey the truth.

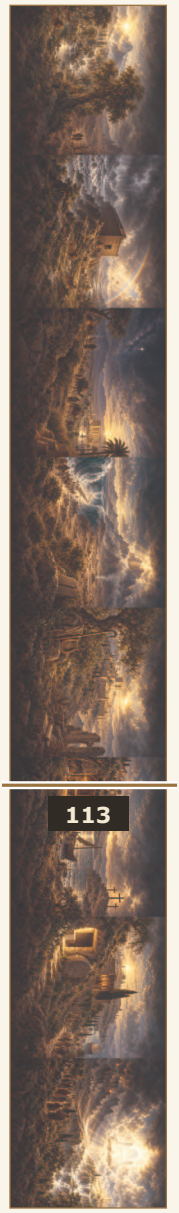
“We can agree to disagree and still love and help each other.”

JOHN WEAVER



John Weaver

John Weaver's sermons form the teaching collection presented by Weaver Bible College. This volume gathers his teaching from that collection.



BOOK 113

WEAVER BOOKS

Can We All Just Get Along?

Old Testament Studies

John Weaver

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Can We All Just Get Along?

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Edited from the sermon corpus of John Weaver.

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CHAPTER 1

Can We All Just Get Along?

Part Two

Introduction: The Question of Division

This is the second message in the series, "Can We All Just Get Along?" The title for this series came from a statement by Rodney King, the black motorist who was beaten by four white police officers in Los Angeles, California. That event set off a riot in which over fifty people were killed and two thousand injured, and it cost Los Angeles over two billion dollars. On May 1, 1992, in appealing for calm and peace, Rodney King asked, "Can we all just get along?"

I was asked that same question in another light by a brother who was dismayed at the divisions and hard feelings among Christians. Many Christians, he was astounded to find, simply cannot get along. Yet our Lord calls divisions, and He was the source of many divisions. In Luke chapter 12, He said that He came not to bring peace, but a sword, and that He came to cause divisions. In one household, the father would be against the son, the son against the father, the mother against the daughter, the daughter against the mother, and the daughter-in-law against the mother-in-law.

There are indeed divisions concerning Jesus Christ. In John 9:16, some of the Pharisees said, "Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, for he keepeth not the Sabbath day." That was their interpretation of the Sabbath. Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such miracles?" And there was a division among them. Christ does indeed divide.

When I speak about getting along, I am certainly not speaking about getting along with infidels, unbelievers, and heretics. I am trying to demonstrate why there are divisions among Christians—people of like faith, people of like practice, and people who profess to believe in Jesus Christ and the Bible as the inspired Word of God.

The Divine Side: God's Sovereignty in Illumination

There are two answers to this question. One is on the divine side, and the other is on the human side. On the divine side, God is not only sovereign in salvation; He is also sovereign in illumination. If God does not open our understanding and enlighten our eyes, we will not see, and we cannot see. God does not give light to all equally, nor does He give the same light to the same people at the same time.

There is indeed the answer of God's absolute sovereignty. When you stop and think about this, God really does not owe us anything. He does not need to enlighten us or inform us, because He is God. As God, He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, and always as He pleases. Elihu, in Job 33:13, asked this question: "Why dost thou strive against him? For he giveth not account of any of his matters."

Isn't that amazing? If I came up to Tom and said, "Roker, how much money do you have?" he could rightly look me in the face and say, "That's none of your business." But since I know he is married and has kids, he does not have much. You see what I am saying? I could ask God something, and God could rightly say to me, "That's none of your business." He does not need to inform us or give us account of any of the matters.

It is true that God must give and grant understanding in His Word. If He does not, we do not see and we do not understand. But the Bible teaches that He does give understanding. Proverbs 2:6 tells

us, "For the Lord giveth wisdom, out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding." The Lord gives wisdom, and out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. Paul instructed Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:7: "Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things."

Since understanding is God's gift, God is not going to give us His understanding and enlightenment willy-nilly. He is not going to give us that understanding without our consideration, meditation, and study of His Word. We do not go to bed dumb and wake up smart. We do not go to sleep ignorant and wake up brilliant. We do not go to bed despising truth and wake up desiring truth. We do not go to bed hating the study of God's Word and wake up with a strong habit of studying His Word.

The Human Side: The Command to Study

It just does not work that way. We do have responsibilities. We have been commanded to study. In 2 Timothy 2 and verse 15, the Scripture says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

So, in answer to the question, why are there divisions among Christians? We must understand not only the divine side, that God is sovereign in illumination. He does not owe us anything. He may either give or withhold His illumination at His pleasure, because He is God. But there is the human side as well, because we have responsibilities. When we fail in those responsibilities, obviously we are not going to have enlightenment, and we are not going to have understanding.

The Failure to Study as a Cause of Division

So, when he says, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth,” I would expect, and I would loudly proclaim, that one of the greatest causes of divisions—listen carefully—is a lack of, or a failure to, study the Word of God. How can you know truth if you do not read? How can you know truth if you do not study?

I am going to make a statement, and I am sure that if each of you were honest, you would back up this statement: the truth is, most Christians never really study. They may read their Bibles, but they do not really study their Bibles. Most Christians know what they have been taught. They know what they have heard. They know what their parents believed. They may even know what the preacher said, but they have never, ever studied the Scriptures for themselves.

When you stop and think about that, people say, "My parents taught me this," or, "My grandparents," or, "My friends." There is a vast difference between hearing something about the Bible and studying the Bible for yourself. It is practically impossible for one to agree with another who is biblical if the former is completely ignorant of Bible doctrine and Bible truth. How can you agree with someone when you do not even know what he is talking about? How can you agree with someone when you do not understand or when you do not see?

Yet we have been commanded to understand, and we have been commanded to study. The Bible contains numerous commands for Christians to have the same mind—that is, we are to think alike.

Now, let me ask you: how is it that Gordon has his life in his family and his work? Tom has his. Ben has his. Robert and Doc have theirs. How is it that, with such different vocations, such different callings, and different environments, we could come together and all have one mind? The answer is that we all believe, read, and study the Word of God, and submit our minds to the Word of God. Let me show you.

I want you to turn in your Bibles, first of all, to the book of Romans, chapter 12. Let us look, if you would please, at verse 16. Romans, chapter 12, verse 16. Here is what the Scripture says: "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." Watch carefully. Notice, "be of the same mind one toward another."

If you would turn right over to First Corinthians, chapter one, just a few pages, and look at verse 10, the apostle Paul says this: "Now, I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing and there be no divisions among you,

but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Wow. How in the world can we have the same mind and the same judgment? We have to submit to the same truth and the same authority. That is how people with different vocations, callings, and environments can come together without divisions and be perfectly joined together.

Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to the book of Philippians, chapter two. Notice, if you would please, verse two. The apostle writes, "Fulfill ye my joy that you be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Isn't that amazing? "Fulfill ye my joy that you be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." Look in Philippians 3 and verse 16.

"Nevertheless, we have already attained. Let us walk by the same rule. Let us mind the same thing." Then, in chapter four and verse two, Paul admonishes two women: "I beseech Euodia, and I beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord." Here were two women who were having a little problem. Sometimes I slip up and call their names "Odious" and "Stinky," but you know. What did Paul tell them? "You better be of the same mind. Quit your arguing. Quit your dividing. Be of the same mind."

First Peter 3:8 says, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous." "Finally, be ye all of one mind." First Peter 4:1 says, "Forasmuch as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind. For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin." May I remind you of Philippians 2:5, where God says, "Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus."

When you go back to 2 Timothy 2:15, notice that if we are going to have the same mind, we have to obey this command. The Word of God tells us to study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed: "Study to show yourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed." How in the world can we have the same mind if we do not study the same book? How can we say the same thing if we do not think alike? And

how can we think alike if we do not study the Scriptures? He said, "Study to show yourselves approved unto God." Now, let me break this verse down for you.

The Greek word for "study" is spoudazo. I love some of these Greek words, and one of my favorite words in the Greek language is the word for wife, gune. Sometimes I say, "There's my gune," or "gunay," "gune." Certain words stand out, and this one is spoudazo. It literally means to endeavor, to do diligence, to be diligent, to give diligence, to labor, and to study. The implication is of one hastening, endeavoring, and exerting himself with diligence. That is what it means when it says "study."

The word for "workman" is ergates. It refers to a laborer, a workman, or a worker—someone who works in the fields, like an agricultural worker. Since I was raised on a farm, I understand what it means to work in the fields. You work in the fields when it is hot, cold, dry, or raining. It does not matter; it has to be done, and you have to do it. It does not matter if you are sweating or freezing. It has to be done. You study to show yourself a workman, someone willing to sweat it out and freeze it out. You study.

Now, watch, if you would, please. He said, "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing." The word "dividing" is unique. It is the Greek word orthotomeo, and it literally means to cut straight: to cut a straight course, to make straight and smooth, to handle rightly, and to teach the truth directly and correctly. I told you it means to cut a straight course. When he says "study," he is talking about real hard work. When he talks about a workman, he is talking about someone laboring in the field. Now he is talking about cutting a straight line. If you have never planted, harrowed, turned dirt, or plowed, let me tell you how to cut a straight line. It is very simple.

When I start out in the field with my tractor, or anyone's tractor, I do not care what I am doing. If it is the first swath through that field, I look way at the far end and pick out one tree. I start driving straight to that tree, and I do not take my eyes off it. When I reach the end, I can look back, and the line will be just as straight as if you had pulled the line on it. But if you ever start looking back to see what you are

doing, you are always going to wiggle. You can never plow straight or plant straight looking back.

You remember what our Lord said? "He that putteth his hand to the plow and looketh back is not fit for the kingdom of God." So, if you are going to cut a straight line, you have to stay straight in the book.

Now watch what he said: "Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly cutting straight the word of truth." If you put this verse together so far, I hope you have come to understand that real study is hard work. The truth is, many pastors do not engage in this hard work, much less Christians. We have failed miserably in Christianity during the last fifty to a hundred years, and our sin of disobedience in this area is catching up with us because we have so many ignorant—downright ignorant—professing Christians.

They could not explain justification by faith, sanctification, or salvation. They cannot explain any major doctrine of the Bible in a reasonable manner that people can understand, because they do not know. Let me show you something. Turn in your Bibles to the book of Proverbs, chapter two.

The Call to Diligent Seeking in Proverbs 2

Proverbs 2, beginning with verse 1: “My son, if thou wilt receive my words and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart unto understanding, yea, if thou cryest after knowledge and liftest up thy voice for understanding, if thou seekest her as for silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures, then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

Look at it carefully. In these few verses, he talks about receiving his words, hiding his commandments, inclining your ear, applying your heart, crying after knowledge, lifting up your voice for understanding, seeking knowledge and understanding as silver, and searching for it as hidden treasures. Then he says, “Thou shalt understand.”

Do you perceive that, just reading Proverbs 2, verses 1 through 6, there is an awful lot of work involved in studying? Wow. Let me ask you a question. If you really want to learn, would you seek understanding as silver and search for hidden treasures? Suppose you knew there was a buried treasure on your property. You knew it for sure; you just did not know where. Would you go out and dig one day and say, "Oh, I'm tired. I'll stop. I'll try this again next month"? Would you do that? No. You would keep digging until you fell out. If you got so tired, you would catch a few hours of sleep and come back and dig again, because you would want that treasure. And God says, when you take that kind of attitude and really want to study, "I'm going to give you some truth."

Now, let me explain something to you. The truth is that study is hard work, which is why most people never engage in it, and why some who begin do not continue with it. Consistency in and of itself is hard work. Study requires discipline and sacrifice. There are very few who are willing to pay the price.

It is easier to remain ignorant. It is easier to depend upon someone else. It is easier just to say, "I'm too busy." Consequently, most professing Christians today are not only ignorant, but ignorant of Bible doctrine on a large scale and ignorant of the Bible in general. It is absolutely astounding when you stop and think of how little people really study.

God has not written His Word for lazy people who are too dilatory, too busy with the things of this world, or like Martha, too busy serving to have time and heart to search and study the Scriptures. When Martha said, "Lord, make Mary help me," He said, "Oh, she's chosen the good part. She's going to sit here and learn." Proverbs 25 and verse 2 says, "It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings to search out a matter." If we have been made kings and priests unto Him, it is our honor to search out His Word. Those who are unwilling to work are unwilling to learn. Those who are unwilling to sweat and dig will never find the treasure. It is just that simple.

There will never be a consensus of doctrine or belief unless Christians in general learn to read, study, and apply the Word of God. Divisions will continue to exist and multiply because of the

ignorance of Christians in general and their disobedience to 2 Timothy 2:15: “Study to show yourselves approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the truth.”

The Responsibility to Listen and Learn

Along with the responsibility to study comes the responsibility to listen and learn. We could classify this as a failure to be taught. The Apostle Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:11, “These things command and teach.” Timothy was a pastor: “These things command and teach.”

Ephesians 4, beginning with verse 8, says, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.”

Remember, he gave gifts unto men in verse 8. What are some of those gifts? Verse 11: “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastor-teachers.” Pastor-teachers is one group. Why did God initially give us apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers? Here is why: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Why did God give pastor-teachers? The apostleship is over and done with. If I were to take time, I could show you that the pastor

has been commanded by Scripture to do the work of an evangelist. So we now have pastor-teachers. The answer is plainly given to us: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying,” or the building, “of the body of Christ, till we all come into the unity of the faith.” Isn’t that amazing? That is having the same mind, “and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect,” or mature, “man, unto the measure, the stature, the fulness of Christ, that we be no more children tossed to and fro.”

In other words, we have grown up. We know. We understand. As a pastor-teacher, I have the duty, responsibility, and obligation of studying, preaching, and teaching. But if that is my duty, obligation, and responsibility, there is a corollary duty and obligation on your part: you are required to listen, learn, and apply the truth being taught. Why did God give pastor-teachers? For the perfecting of the saints, the building up of the body of Christ, and the maturing of believers.

I understand that not every Christian can devote hours a day to study. Not every Christian has the same calling; not every Christian is called to be a pastor-teacher. Most have different vocations and therefore are unable to spend hours a day studying. We have a couple of doctors here.

I never will forget when I was a boy. The doctor that I went to was Dr. Sam's. I think he finally died about 100 years of age, and he looked just as young at 100 as he did in the 60s and 70s. I often thought as a boy, "How does he do this?" He was there day and night, and if you were in the hospital, he was there, too. Now, I can assure you that a doctor who stays with it and has emergency calls is not going to have three or four or five hours a day to study. He's just not going to do it.

You may not have four or five hours a day to study, but you can be faithful to the preaching and teaching of the word of God. Each Christian, no matter what your occupation, can listen, learn, take notes, and seek to apply the truth that he has heard. Each Christian can ask questions and search the scriptures in those areas in which he does not understand or is unclear upon.

Do you remember in Acts chapter 17, it was the Apostle Paul who preached to the Bereans? Here's what the Bible says, Acts 17 verse 11: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily whether these things were so." What separated the Bereans from the Thessalonicans and the Athenians in Acts 17? They had a ready mind to receive the word of God, and they searched the scriptures daily to verify that what the Apostle Paul said was true.

Even hearing requires discipline, concentration, and determination. If you're going to hear, you have to work at being undistracted, control your thoughts, listen intently, and seek to follow the line of thought, the scriptures, and the points being made. I preach approximately an hour each time I preach. What I give you in an hour has cost me hours, days, months, and sometimes years. People ask, "Well, how long did it take you to work up that message?" I always like to smile and say, "53 years," because that's how long I've been studying.

Some messages come very quickly; others do not. I've got messages that I'm working on that I've been working on for over a year. If you can learn in an hour what it has taken me days and weeks and months on earth, you're by far the better off. But let me tell you what the problem is. The problem is very simple.

And I learned this the hard way many years ago. If something doesn't really cost you, you don't really appreciate it. Since my work, or the work of any pastor, doesn't really cost you, sometimes you take the attitude, "Easy come, easy go. If I don't get it this week, I'll get it next week. If I don't get it next week, I'll catch it next month. If I don't get it next month, I'll catch it next year." And the truth is, you never get it and you never catch it. When you sit, and listening and paying attention cost you, you are not distracted, you concentrate, and you see, then you appreciate what you have.

Our Lord said in Matthew 11, verse 15, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." If you have ears, if you have the ability to hear, you are obligated and responsible to hear the truth. I am pointing out why there are so many divisions. First, I have pointed out the divine side; now I am on the human side.

Most Christians do not study. Most Christians really do not listen to the preaching of the Word of God. They do not learn. They do not apply. Preaching to most people has become a ritual, a ceremony. We go to church because if we do not, somebody might think we are an atheist, or somebody might say something about us. We do not really go to worship God. We do not really go to learn.

The Principle of Using or Losing Truth

There is the failure to apply the truth and to live by biblical principle. When you fail to apply the truth and when you fail to live by biblical principle, it leads to ignorance, a loss of understanding, and division. You are going to ask me, "How can the failure to apply the truth lead to ignorance, a loss of understanding, and division?" The answer is very simple: God has designed and ordained a principle. If you do not use the truth, you lose the truth. If you hear and acquire a mental understanding of what is said, but then do not apply it to your life, you lose the truth, because it is really not yours until you apply it.

In Mark chapter four, our Lord said, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." He said unto them, "Take heed what you hear. With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you, and to you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given, and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." Notice first that our Lord gives us a specific warning. After He says, "If any man have ears to hear, let him hear," He says, "Take heed what you hear."

In other words, it is your responsibility to make sure that what you are hearing is the Word of God. When you get to Luke 8:18 in the same context, He says it a little differently: "Take heed how ye hear." You are responsible not only for what you hear, but also for how you hear. God says, first and foremost, make sure you are hearing the Word of God. Secondly, take heed how you hear it. These second and third points are intimately connected with the first.

Our Lord establishes a second principle in verse 24: "Take heed what ye hear." "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you." Let me explain it this way: "Take heed what ye hear. With what measure ye measure, it shall be measured unto you." To the degree that you give yourself to reading, studying, and applying the

Scripture, to that same degree truth will be measured to you. You are not going to read and study your Bible for ten minutes and receive two hours' worth of truth. You are not going to study one chapter and receive twenty chapters' worth of truth. God will measure truth to you according to the same degree, or measure, that you give to understanding truth. If you do not give much time to reading, studying, and applying truth, you are not going to receive much.

Now, third, look at verse 24: "And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given."

Why in the world should God give you more truth if you will not obey the truth He has already given you? Why would God give you more truth if you will not apply and use the truth He has already given you? He said, "Unto you that hear shall more be given." Truth unapplied is worthless. It may still be truth, but if you do not apply it, it is worthless to you.

I'm not a mechanic, but if you had car problems or engine problems, and I knew enough to tell you to check something else, and it was the truth, and you didn't do it, to you that truth is worthless; it's useless. You did not apply it.

Because if you do not use the truth, you lose the truth. Look in verse 25: "For he that hath, to him shall be given. And he that hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he hath." So God says, if you use the truth, if you apply the truth, I'm going to give you more truth. However, if you fail to use it, if you fail to apply it, you're going to lose it.

Now, let me explain why. Unless you apply the truth, it's not really yours to begin with. In Luke 8:18, our Lord says the same thing, just a little differently: "Take heed therefore how you hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have."

In other words, if you don't apply truth, you don't really have it. You just seem to have it. You might have an intellectual grasp of it, but if you don't apply it, it is not yours. How many of you have learned facts all of your life, and you cannot even give me twenty of the facts that you learned when you were twenty years of age? Or

sixteen? You know why? If you don't use the truth, you lose the truth.

You could take your right arm, strap it to your body, and leave it tied there for three or four months. When it is loosed, you're going to have to rebuild that muscle, and you're going to learn to use that arm all over again, because it dissipates. The muscle disappears. The word is atrophy. It goes away.

It's the same thing with biblical truth. If you do not apply it and use it, you lose it. When Christians fail to study or fail to listen, or if they hear something and say, "Oh, man, that's good. That's truth," yet never apply it, they lose it. It's gone. That's why the author of the book of Hebrews said we ought to give the more earnest heed to these things, lest at any time we let them slip.

God's Sovereignty Even When We Use the Means

Let me make an application. I am not through with this; I have two more messages to demonstrate why there are so many divisions based upon our failure in our Christian responsibilities. But here is the first application: even when we use the means God has ordained, God is still sovereign in illumination. He may give illumination, or He may withhold it. I could say, “I am going to sit here and read the book of Luke over and over until I understand this thing.” But if God does not open my mind and understanding, I could read until I died and still never understand it. Understanding is His gift, and God may give it or withhold it at His discretion. He may deprive any of us of wisdom and understanding at His pleasure.

I read this week of some people who did mighty stupid things that cost them their lives, or at least the lives of others. I thought, “How could anyone do something like that?” It is because they have been deprived of understanding.

The ostrich is a good example of one that has been deprived of understanding. Look in your Bibles to Job chapter 39, beginning with verse 13. Everyone knows how protective a mother is of her child, or how protective a hen is of her eggs when she is sitting on them to hatch them. But watch what God says as He asks Job,

“Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?”

Now look what the ostrich does: “Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in the dust,” she lays them, covers them, forgets them, and forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. Look what God says: “She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not hers: her labour is in vain without fear; because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.”

The ostrich can really run, but God has deprived her of wisdom; neither has He imparted her understanding. She lays an egg, covers it in the dust, and walks off. Anything could happen to it. Why? Because God deprived her of wisdom and did not impart understanding to her.

When I was studying this, I could not help thinking of Samson—Samson and Delilah. I've often said, "I may be stupid, but I'm not that stupid." If Alice asked me, "Tell me where all your strength is," and I said, "Oh, it's in my wavy curly hair," then I woke up one morning and all my wavy curly hair was gone, I would think she was not looking after my best interest. Something would be wrong. Or if I told her, "If you weave it with a spider's web and tie it to a beam," and everything I told Delilah was done to me, I would understand what was happening.

Yet Samson never put two and two together. Finally, when he told her the truth, she shaved his head. He went out and shook himself as at other times, and wist not that the Lord was departed from him.

Now I have to ask myself, How could he be so stupid? Could the answer be given to us in Proverbs 6:32? "But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding." God says that when you commit adultery, you are just plain stupid; you have no understanding.

There are a number of things in the Bible that God says make people just plain stupid. Proverbs 12:11 says, "He that tilleth his land shall be satisfied with bread: but he that followeth vain persons is void of understanding." If you work and earn your bread by the

sweat of your brow, you will be satisfied. But somebody who follows a little gang to steal and rob is stupid and has no understanding. The same thing appears in Proverbs 24:30: "I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding." In other words, he will not work.

He lets everything go to ruin. Do you remember that passage in Matthew 13, verse 19, the parable of the sower? Our Lord said, "When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart." God also speaks of some in First Timothy 1:7: "Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." Here are some who claim to be teachers and are totally without understanding because they want understanding apart from God. It is true that we must seek God for understanding.

We are commanded to do so. However, understanding is His gift. He may give it or withhold it temporarily or permanently. It is totally up to Him. He gives His gifts at His pleasure, not at our demands. God is never going to give us enlightenment and illumination unless we use the means He has ordained and ask Him for His gift of illumination and understanding.

Conclusion and Prayer

When we see truth, it should make us grateful and thankful because we see when others do not see. Secondly, it should make us humble. If God had not opened our eyes and given us truth, we would not have it, because everything is of Him. If we do not study, listen, learn, and apply, we will not only remain in ignorance; we will be the source of division, strife, and heartache. I think our Lord said it like this: "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to You this day. We thank You for Your Word and truth. Teach us and build us up in the most holy faith. Enable us, Lord, to study and to seek Thee for illumination, enlightenment, and understanding. Enable us, Heavenly Father, to live for Thee and love Thee. If we do not have much time each day, enable us to take at least one chapter or one verse to look at it, meditate upon it, think upon it, turn it over and

over in our minds all day, and ask You to give us understanding. In the name of Jesus Christ we ask and pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 2

Can We All Just Get Along?

Part Three

Introduction and Review of the Series

This is the third message in this brief series, "Can We All Just Get Along?" In 1 John 2:12–14, John writes: "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one."

When I started this series, I pointed out that its title came from a statement by Rodney King, the black motorist who was beaten by four white cops. Once they were acquitted, there were riots in Los Angeles. On May 1, 1992, Rodney King appealed for calm and asked this question: "Can we all just get along?" What stimulated me to preach this series was a conversation with a good friend who was

absolutely dismayed at the division and strife appearing between Christians, especially even Christians of like faith and practice. Truly, the feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and ignorance that produce divisions between Christians are indeed alarming. While it is true that the world is going to divide over the person and work of Jesus Christ, Christians should at least try to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and faithful to his word.

In order to do so, we must study and apply the truth. In the first message, I pointed out from Luke 12:49–53 that Jesus Christ said he came not to bring peace, but a sword, and that he came to bring division. There would always be divisions because of him. I went through the New Testament and showed in several places where the Bible says, "And there was a division among them because of the person and work of Jesus Christ."

When I am talking about getting along, I am not talking about getting along with infidels, unbelievers, and heretics. I am trying to demonstrate from Scripture the many divisions that are caused, sometimes even among people of faith, because we do not follow the Word of God and do not fulfill our responsibilities.

In the first message, I pointed out how God is absolutely sovereign in illumination. God does not give everyone the same light, nor does He give everyone the same light at the same time. Neither does He give everyone the same amount of light. God gives understanding based upon His own sovereignty. The Bible tells us in Proverbs 2:6 that "wisdom proceedeth from God, and understanding cometh from the mouth of God." It is His gift. One answer to the divisions and strife among Christians is based upon God's absolute sovereignty. God really does not owe us anything.

Review of Failures in Christian Responsibility

Elihu asks in Job 33:13, "Why dost thou strive against him? For he giveth not account of any of his matters." In other words, God does not owe us anything. The very fact that He enlightens and illuminates us and enables us to understand certain truth is based upon His grace and mercy.

The other answer to the question of why there are so many divisions and strifes is a failure in our Christian responsibilities. From the divine side, God is sovereign; from the human side, there is our failure. The first failure I pointed out was a failure to study. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:15, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.” One of the greatest causes of divisions among Christians is a failure to study the Word of God.

It is impossible to agree on a doctrinal subject when either one or both parties are ignorant of the truth of Scripture. You are never going to have agreement when someone is ignorant of the Word of God. The second thing I pointed out was a failure to possess a teachable spirit. When you do not possess a teachable spirit, you are unable to be taught. Such a person refuses to listen, refuses to learn, and refuses to apply the truth.

Will Rogers said, “It isn't what we don't know that gives us trouble. It's what we know that ain't so.” I could add that it is what we think we know that ain't so. The man who refuses to be taught is either in absolute rebellion, or he is full of pride and thinks he knows everything. In 1 Corinthians 8:2, the Apostle Paul says, “And if any man think that he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.” When you think you know it all, you do not really know anything. Usually, pride keeps us from having a teachable spirit.

The third failure I pointed out was a failure to apply the truth and to live by biblical principle. Such failure always leads to ignorance, a loss of understanding, and division. Our Lord said in Mark 4:23–25, “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.” And He said to them, “Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again, and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given: and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath.” If you do not use the truth, you lose the truth.

That which is left unapplied and unused is not truly understood from the beginning. If you understood it, you would use it; if you understood it, you would apply it.

The Fourth Failure: Not Recognizing Stages of Christian Growth

Today I want to continue showing the failures in Christian responsibility, because there is a fourth area where divisions arise and which sometimes causes a great deal of strife: a failure to recognize and understand the stages of Christian growth. We are not instantly mature when we are saved. We do not instantly know everything or understand truth, nor do we have instantaneous truth at our disposal. In fact, there are at least four different stages to maturity.

The Stage of Babes in Christ

In 1 John chapter 2, the Apostle John divides Christians into little children, young men, and fathers. The Greek words actually mean little children, young men, and fathers. He writes, “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.” He says to the fathers, “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning,” and to the young men, “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” Then he says again to the little children, “I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.” In verse 14, he again speaks of the fathers and the young men.

But 1 Corinthians 3 shows that there is another stage. Paul says, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.” He had fed them with milk, and not with meat, because they had not been able to bear it. “For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?”

The Greek word for carnal is sarkikos, translated as either carnal or fleshly. It refers to individuals under the control of the flesh, under the control of their animal appetites, governed more by human nature than by the Spirit of God. Paul had to write to them as carnal, as fleshly, because they were babes in Christ.

Being a babe in Christ and being carnal does not mean that you are running around committing fornication, adultery, lying, stealing, and killing. Their carnality was based upon divisions over preachers.

One was saying, “I like the Apostle Peter.” Another said, “No, no, no, I like Paul.” Another said, “Apollos is a far greater orator. We ought to all go listen to Apollos.” Some said, “I'm more spiritual than all of you. I just prefer Jesus.” Thus there was division over the personalities of preachers. Paul says these Corinthians were acting like babies in the flesh. They were self-centered, demanding that things go their way and that others like what they liked and wanted. If they did not get their way, there were strife and division.

They were unable to be taught anything because they were babies. If you turn to Hebrews chapter 5, you will see essentially the same thing. The passage concerns the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. Verse 10 says, “Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchizedek.” He is talking about Jesus Christ. Then verse 11 says, “Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

Notice, both in Hebrews chapter 5 and in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, the Bible says they are babes in Christ. When a person is first converted, when he turns from his sins and in faith embraces Jesus Christ, he is a babe in Christ.

Every parent understands that you must be more gentle, patient, and understanding in dealing with a baby. That which is true physically is also true spiritually. No parents and no Christians will ever be successful in dealing with a baby if they are impatient, demanding, and demonstrate a lack of tenderness and compassion.

The Stage of Little Children

I shared with Alice a story that I read and saw a picture of. I told her, “I have the remedy.” A foster father took a two-month-old foster baby to the hospital because something was wrong. The doctors became suspicious, and the baby had thirty-five broken bones, including in the baby's back. The foster father admitted to doing it.

I read things like that, and it just blows my mind. When you think of a baby, you cannot be rough with a baby, because a baby is a baby.

In the book of John, particularly, the term "little children" is also used as a term of love and affection in certain Scriptures applied to all Christians. John, the aged apostle, could therefore say to all Christians, "little children." But in 1 John 2:12-14, he is still talking about little children, and the word there designates a young child.

The first stage is that of being a baby in Christ. When someone is first converted, you must understand that knowledge and maturity are not instantaneous. You are dealing with someone who requires great patience, tenderness, concern, and love, with things explained over and over because this is a baby.

But the next step is a young child. In 1 John chapter 2, he says, "little children." One Greek word used for "little children" is paidion. Paidion refers to an advanced child, or one advanced in maturity and intellect. The same Greek word, paidion, is translated several times in Hebrews chapter 12 as chastisement. Actually, the word means child training. How do you train a child? You train the child with instruction and also with chastisement. You do not necessarily train a baby that way, but a young child, yes, you can train that way. This is the training of a young child, rather than a baby. The word refers to training not only in education and cultivation of the mind, but also in cultivation of morals and principles of right and wrong. So, how does one go from a baby to a young child? What is the difference?

Peter writes, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

Here is what he is saying: Lay aside all your malice, guile, hypocrisy, envies, strife, and all your trying to convince everybody of everything that you want and think. Lay all that aside and, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby. If you have tasted that the Lord is gracious, you are going to want more.

Let me put this in good South Georgia lingo so you can understand it: Shut up. Quit feeling sorry for yourself. Quit demanding your own way. Quit complaining and pretending. Drink your milk. Get nourished and grow. That is what Peter is saying.

Once you get started on the milk of the Word, although it may be mild, it is not meat yet, it is still that which makes you want more. No one will mature who neglects, rejects, or despises the reading and study of the Word of God. No one.

If a baby is born and does not want milk, does not desire milk, will not take milk, and will not eat, what does that mean? It means the child is stillborn; he is dead. It is the nature of a child, of a babe, to want milk.

When you find a professing Christian who refuses to read the Bible, refuses to study, and refuses to listen to the teaching of the Word of God—who does not like it and does not want it—you have found someone who really needs to check whether or not he is a real Christian. It is just as natural for a baby to desire milk as it is for a Christian to desire the Word of God. If something is wrong in that desire, there is something wrong in the life.

The difference between a baby and a young child is this: A baby can only take milk, but a young child can take milk and meat. He may not necessarily be able to take a lot of meat at one time.

A baby can take some meat, usually after it has been ground up or softened. As the child learns that there is more than milk, he begins to desire meat. In 1 John, chapter two, John gives us the characteristics of a young child, a young man, and a father. This is how we can tell the difference and know with whom we are dealing.

If a young Christian is demanding and self-centered, always wanting his will and his way or becoming angry, he is nothing but a babe. He is described in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 and Hebrews 5:11–14. But when he becomes a young child, he has progressed.

Look at verse 12: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” The very first thing that a young child knows is that his sins are forgiven. Interestingly, the Greek word “forgiven” is a perfect passive indicative. This

emphasizes that they have known they are forgiven and continue to know that they are forgiven.

They realize that this forgiveness is real and genuine. The youngest disciple knows that his sins have been forgiven for the sake of Jesus Christ. The pardon and forgiveness he has received are based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus, this young child understands and shares in the blessing of forgiveness and in the abundance of God's grace and mercy, which have proceeded from the person and work of Jesus Christ and His shed blood.

That is why the Bible says that your sins are forgiven for His name's sake. It is not for any merit in the young child, nor for his works, good deeds, or decision, nor for anything he has done. He knows that his sins are forgiven because of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The first thing a young child truly grasps is the forgiveness of sins.

We're not talking about a baby. We're talking about a young child. Here's the second thing that a young child grasps. Look in verse 13. He says, "I write unto you, little children, because you have known the Father." The phrase "you have known the Father" again is a perfect active indicative, which means they knew Him when He revealed Himself to them, and they continue to know who He is.

Every young child in a physical sense recognizes his father. When our oldest grandson and his wife were staying with us for a little while, they had their first child. When the child was able to start making noises and trying to say words, I would say to the young child, "You say Papa." Daddy would say, "No, you say Daddy." They went back and forth, and the child ended up saying Daddy first. But the point I'm making is that even a young child recognizes his father.

The second thing that a young child really recognizes, spiritually speaking as well as physically, is his father. Look in Romans chapter 8, verse 15: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." When a person is converted and comes from a babe to a young child, he recognizes his Father.

Look in Galatians chapter 4, verse 6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying,

Abba, Father." Lord willing, I am going to cover these verses in the not-too-distant future, because I am dealing with a series of messages on the implication of the term "our Father."

The word Abba is a Hebrew word. Here's what it means: Papa. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, whereby we cry, "Papa, Father," which is a term of endearment and intimacy. So the Bible says that every young child at least knows his sins are forgiven, and he knows who his Father is.

A young child that knows his father is a wise child, and a young child that obeys his father is a wise child. I have found it interesting to observe how easy it is for a young child to learn. They want to learn, and obedience is easy for them. Young parents have said to me concerning their three-, four-, or five-year-old child, "I want you to see how well he or she obeys." They will say something to the child, and the child does exactly what the father says. I smile and say, "Wait until they're 16."

Now, at 16, you should obey your father. Don't misunderstand me. But usually, the older the child gets, the more he thinks he's the mature one. So it is easy for a young child to obey, and the young child wants to obey. By the way, the knowledge of the Father is distinctive of Christianity.

There is no Christianity apart from the knowledge of the Father. This is why Jesus Christ came. What did He say in John 17, verse 3? "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." This is Christianity. Even a young child realizes, "I'm in the family of God. I'm a member of His family. He loves me. He's the one that regenerated me. He's the one that created me." Thus, even a young child knows and understands the relationship he has with his Father and the love that the Father has shown to him. Usually, as I've already said, a young child is an eager student.

He is willing to learn and ready to learn. That is why children, when they are three, four, or five years old, have 100 questions. They ask the questions they want to know. When our physical children start asking us questions, we don't get angry, upset, or impatient. We

answer their questions. We try to teach them, train them, and give them the information they need.

We're patient with that young child because we understand the child's age and characteristics. The same thing is true spiritually speaking. A young Christian, not a babe in Christ, is going to want answers. He's going to want to understand, and he will pester you until he finds those answers. Years ago, there was a young man I was witnessing to—tried to witness to.

He would see me on the street and cross to the other side just so he would not have to speak to me. He could see me coming one way and turn and go the other way. Then, when God finally got hold of him and saved him, it would be midnight at our house, and I would look at him and say, “Gary, you’re going to have to go home. I’ve got to go to bed.” He would keep asking questions, one right after the other. That’s the way young children are.

The Stage of Young Men

Do you remember that Peter denied the Lord three times? When he was restored in John 21, our Lord asked Peter three times, “Peter, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?” Each time Peter answered in the affirmative: “Yes, I love you.” Interestingly, our Lord responded differently. The first time He asked Peter, “Do you love me?” and Peter said, “Yes, Lord, I love you.” Our Lord said, “Feed my lambs.” The next two times, when Peter answered affirmatively, “Yes, Lord, you know I love you,” He said, “Feed my sheep.” There is a difference between feeding lambs and feeding sheep. Peter had to be more patient with Christ’s lambs than he would with His sheep.

You cannot give the same thing to the lamb, or at least as much of it, as you give to the sheep. John then speaks about little children. The next level is young men. In 1 John 2:13 he says, “I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” Then, in the middle of verse 14: “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

Spiritually speaking, you progress from a babe to a young child to a young man. The particular characteristic of young men is their strength. That is true physically and also spiritually. We did some work at the house this week, and since Andrew was helping me, I let him do the heavy work. Because he is younger, he is stronger and can do it. That is the strength and characteristic of young men. It takes strength to overcome the wicked one. Let me show you.

In Luke chapter 11, verses 21 and 22, our Lord says it like this: "When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." So, a man may be strong, but there's always someone that happens to be a little stronger. The devil is strong, but Jesus Christ is stronger. And notice, if you look, what the Bible says. He said, "I've written unto you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one because you are strong." And our Lord here also gives us the source of his strength. Watch verse 14: "I have written unto you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and you have overcome the wicked one." So what is the source of strength for young men?

The fact is that the word of God abides in them. In Colossians 3:16, the Bible says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” What gave these young men their strength? It was indeed the Word of God.

The young men are powerful in battle. Have you ever noticed that you do not send seventy-year-old men to fight wars? You send young men because of their strength. The Bible says in Revelation 12:11, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of their testimony, and because they loved not their lives unto death.

Did you know that the word “overcome” is peculiar to the Apostle John in one sense? It occurs sixteen times in the book of Revelation, the Apocalypse; six times in 1 John; and only three times in the rest of the New Testament. John speaks about overcoming, and what he

is saying is that, in order to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, we must do so on the ground of the blood of Jesus Christ and His Word. We must abide in Him. If we are going to be fit for battle and fit in battle, we must rely completely and totally upon Him.

Isaiah 40:28 says, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary?”

Isaiah says, “There is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” Note that the Bible says, “He giveth power to the faint. And to them that have no might, He increaseth strength.” Every young man may be naturally strong, but he has to be spiritually strong, strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, if he is going to overcome. Thus, you progress from a babe to a young child and then to a young man.

There are three different stages here, and every stage is totally different. The fourth and final stage John talks about is fathers. In 1 John chapter two, verse 13, he says, “I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning.” Then, in verse 14: “I have written unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning.” Why did John write exactly the same thing twice concerning the fathers?

The Stage of Fathers

A father has been a babe, a young child, and a young man, and now he is a father. He is of an advanced age and has a family of his own, probably grandsons and great-grandsons. John is saying that fathers have been long acquainted with the principles of Christianity and understand its doctrines and duties. Fathers in the faith have reached the place where Jesus Christ is everything. Christ is known as He is, as He was manifested from the beginning, and now the fathers know that He and He alone can sustain them, nourish them, preserve them, protect them, provide for them, and give grace and

glory as well. Fathers have reached the stage where the world has no attachment to them.

A lot of times we laugh at older men. I remember a story about a man in his nineties who stood up in church and gave a testimony. He said he thanked the Lord that he had not had a desire to dance in twenty years. We smile at something like that, but the truth is that the older you get, the less attractive the world becomes to you.

A friend called me recently and told me how to make all kinds of money. I said, "Let me be honest with you. I would like to live comfortably, but I have no desire to make a lot of money. I would like to have my needs met, like everybody else, but I am not interested in being a millionaire, multi-millionaire, or billionaire. What would I do with it? You say, 'Look what you could buy.' I do not care."

The fathers have reached the place in their lives where the world really has no allurements for them. They simply do not care. A number of years ago, I received a call from the telephone company. They said I had been a good customer and that they could save me money by bundling my house phone, Internet, and television. I asked what they meant by bundling, and then said, "I do not really think you could save me money on my television."

She asked how much I was paying. I said, "Really, I am not paying anything." She asked whether I must have an antenna. I said, "No, I do not have an antenna." She asked how I could have free television. I answered, "Because I do not have television. I do not watch television. I do not care anything about television." She asked what I did, and I said, "We read."

Have you ever heard of reading? I do not care anything about movies or television. That is not me. If you want to watch it, that is fine, as long as you do not watch anything wicked and wrong. David said, "I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." I am simply saying that I have no desire for it.

John is saying, "You fathers, I've written unto you because you have known Him that is from the beginning." You know it. You've progressed. You've seen Him. You understand Him, and you're satisfied with Him. According to the Bible, fathers are to be honored

and respected—not just your own earthly father. Scripture says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise; that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.” That is true.

But let me show you something else. Leviticus 19:32 says, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.” Part of fearing God is honoring the face of the old man and rising up before the hoary head. In other words, you need to respect your elders. That's what he's saying.

Proverbs 16:31 specifies how certain older men are to be honored: “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.” God specifies this and tells you specifically how certain older men are to be honored. Wow. So a righteous father in the faith deserves to be honored doubly.

Let me give you a quote from Matthew Henry. I want you to listen carefully. This just hits the nail on the head. Matthew Henry said, “To those of the highest station and stature, to the seniors in Christianity, to whom he gives the honorable appellation, I write unto you, fathers, unto you nascents, you old disciples.”

“The apostle immediately passes from the bottom to the top of the school, from the lowest form to the highest, that those in the middle may hear both lessons, may remember what they have learned, and perceive what they must come to. I write unto you, fathers, those that are of long standing in Christ's school have need of further advice and instruction. The oldest disciple must go to heaven, the university above, with his book, his Bible, in his hand. Fathers must be written to and preached to.”

None are too old to learn. He writes to them on account of their knowledge: “I write unto you, fathers, because you have known him that is from the beginning.” Old men have knowledge and experience and expect deference. The apostle is ready to own the knowledge of all Christians and to congratulate them thereupon. They know the Lord Christ, particularly him that was from the beginning. As Christ is Alpha and Omega, so He must be the beginning and the end of our

Christian knowledge. “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,” said Paul in Philippians 3:8. Those who know Him that was from the beginning, before the world was made, may well be induced thereby to relinquish this world.

No matter how old you are, you are never too old to learn. I have always said, when someone quotes, “You can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” that you are not a dog, and we are not teaching tricks. We are teaching principles from the Word of God, and you are never too old to learn.

Application: Dealing with Different Maturity Levels

There are divisions already among Christians. Some are babes, some are young children, some are young men, and some are fathers. These divisions are not based upon sin and rebellion, but upon different levels of maturity. We have to learn to deal with each believer and each Christian according to his own level of maturity. Have you ever noticed that a baby is more demanding than a father? Rebecca has had to get up two or three times and take Mercy out, while she has not taken Reese out one time. The baby is far more demanding than the father—at times. A young man has more energy and strength than the father, usually. Josh can probably get up at five in the morning, go to bed at eleven or twelve at night, while I get up at five and go to bed at eight thirty. The strength of the young man is his characteristic.

We have to recognize not only the different stages of maturity, but also the different characteristics of each stage. If you are going to deal with fellow believers and Christians, you have to deal with them according not only to their maturity level, but also to their knowledge. If you expect mature knowledge from a baby, a young child, or even a young man, you are going to be sorely disappointed. You will only get mature knowledge from a father—and by mature knowledge from a father, I am talking particularly about fathers in the faith.

Elihu said this in Job 32:9: “Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment.” Just because you get old,

if you have not grown old in Jesus Christ and in the Word of God, that does not mean you understand judgment and knowledge.

The Bible says in 1 Timothy 5:1: “Rebuke not an elder.” “But entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren.” An elder is a pastor or preacher: rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father. What is God saying? Remember Leviticus 19:32: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head. Thou shalt honour the face of the old man.” Remember Proverbs 16:31, where he said, “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.”

There is not one adult man in this room who would go up to his earthly father, if his earthly father were still alive, shake his finger in his face, and say, “Let me tell you something, Daddy,” and cuss him out. Not one of us would ever do that.

Likewise, God says that when it comes to our spiritual fathers, you do not rebuke them as you would others; you entreat them as a father and speak respectfully. Do old men sin? Yes. Do they need to be corrected? Yes. Do they need to be confronted? Yes. But when it is done, God says, it must be done with respect and honor.

It is like taking a two-month-old baby and beating him mercilessly with a rod. Why? The baby does not understand. Wherever you are in your Christian walk, you must live by biblical principle. The truth of God is to guide us regardless of our maturity level and the characteristics in our lives.

I usually tell people that the cunning and craftiness of old men can usually whip the strength of young men anyhow. Just remember that.

Father, thank You for Your love, grace, mercy, goodness, and kindness. Lord, teach us. Help us to respect, love, and deal with one another according to the characteristics and maturity of our faith. Help us always be willing to listen and learn, and also willing to teach and be taught. Give us grace that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In Thy name we pray, Amen.

CHAPTER 3

Can We All Just Get Along?

Part One of Four

Introduction: The Problem of Division Among Christians

In Luke 24, verses 15 and 16, we read concerning the two men on the Emmaus road: “And it came to pass that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near with them and went with them, and their eyes were holden that they should not know him.” Note particularly: “their eyes were holden that they should not know him.” Many will recognize the source of the title of this message, “Can we all just get along?”

Those words were spoken by Rodney King, the black motorist who was arrested and beaten by four white officers from the Los Angeles Police Department in 1991. Riots broke out after the four officers were acquitted in the spring of 1992. The five days of rioting left 50 dead and over 2,000 wounded, and the riots cost the city of Los Angeles over $2 billion. Appealing for common peace on May 1, 1992, Rodney King asked, “Can we all just get along?”

I was talking recently to a Christian friend who was dismayed at the friction and division that exists between Christians, particularly because many Christians simply cannot get along with one another. Understandably, we cannot get along with the wicked. We cannot get along with anyone who denies the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ or the inspiration and authority of the Bible. We are not going to get along with anyone who denies the fundamentals of faith. The truth of the matter is that this division was caused by Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ: The Great Divider

He is indeed the great divider. In Luke chapter 12, beginning with verse 49, our Lord Himself says: "I have come to send fire on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straightened till it is accomplished? Suppose you that I come to give peace on earth, I tell you nay, but rather division."

"For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, the son against the father, and the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother, the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law." Notice that our Lord is speaking of the fact that He is indeed the great divider.

The Bible says in John 7:43, "So there was a division among the people because of Him." In John 9:16, the Pharisees said, "This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath day." Others said, "How can a sinner do such miracles?" So there was a division among them. In John 10:19, again, "There was a division among them, among the Jews, for this saying." Every time you read the Scripture, you will find a division based upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is indeed the great divider.

He divides the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the tares, and the righteous from the wicked. We will either be separated unto Him or separated from Him. There is a division between the righteous and the wicked, and also between what we would call the seed of the godly and the seed of the wicked one.

The Warfare Between the Seeds

In the Protevangelium, found in Genesis 3:15, God cursed the serpent and said, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Thus a warfare began between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. That warfare not only began then, but has continued. Consequently, in Genesis chapter 4, Cain murders Abel. There is indeed a warfare between the righteous and the wicked—a war between the progeny of the seed of the woman, which refers to Jesus Christ because He was born of the virgin, and the seed of the serpent.

Division Over Heresy

We grasp that reality. We can also grasp that there is a division not just between the righteous and the wicked, but between the righteous and those whom we would deem absolutely heretical. Titus chapter 3, verses 10 and 11, says, “A man that is a heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject; knowing that such an one is subverted and sinneth and condemneth himself.” God says that a man who refuses to listen, heed, or obey the word of God after the first and second admonition should be rejected, because he is condemned.

SCRIPTURE READING - John 17:20-24 (KJV)

The Troubling Divisions Among Christians

> Now we have no problem grasping the division between the righteous and the wicked, and we have no problem grasping the division between the righteous and the heretics. But that which concerns many people, and it should rightly concern us, is the divisions and the lack of compassion that occurs between Christians. Why is it that seemingly those who belong to Jesus Christ at many times are at variance with each other? They are divided. They cannot get along. They show absolutely no compassion. And there is strife and division and sometimes what you and I would call just outright hatred. So why is that?

> It is true that our Lord prayed that we might be one. This is our Lord's high priestly prayer, and we know that this prayer is going to be answered. He says:
>
> "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them, that they may be one even as we are one. I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me. Father, I will also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me, for Thou lovest me before the foundation of the world."
>
> When you look at this prayer, you ask, well, why in the world cannot we be one since Jesus Christ prayed for this? The truth of the matter is we are going to be one ultimately. There is certainly no perfection in this life. John Gill was a great Baptist expositor, and here's what he said on this passage: "This may regard their unity in the faith and in the knowledge of Christ, for there is but one faith which all truly experienced souls agree in, and they are converted by the same Spirit, and have the same work of grace wrought in them, and though they have not the same degree of light and measure of spiritual knowledge, yet they agree in the main point of the gospel, salvation alone by the Lord Jesus Christ."

Gill says that agreement in the doctrine of faith and its grand articles concerning the person and offices of Christ is absolutely necessary for comfortably walking together in church fellowship, and for the honorable carrying on of the worship of God. This will be more fully manifested in the latter days, when the saints shall see eye to eye.

Likewise, a unity in affection may be intended: being knit together in love, which is the bond of perfectness, the evidence of regeneration, the badge of the Christian profession, the beauty of church communion, and a barrier and security from the common enemy. Without it, social worship and mutual service will either be

neglected or coldly performed. Moreover, this petition may refer to the gathering together of all the saints at the last day, as one body united in faith and love, one General Assembly and Church of the Firstborn, one fold of Christ, who is the Head, the Savior, and the Shepherd.

So Gill is saying that this could refer to oneness in doctrine, but he believes it is probably referring more to the last day, when everyone will see eye to eye and understand everything. I do not think anyone believes there will be perfection in this life in any shape, form, or fashion. We may have a glimmer of what we would call perfection in our mutual love, in our worship, and in our coming together in Jesus Christ. Yet, in spite of mutual love and worshiping together as a church, there are divisions and differences, some major and some minor.

Some divisions even occur outside the church. One thing that has troubled me for many years is that many pastors cannot get along with one another. They disagree over a minor issue—perhaps eschatology, baptism, or something else. They may agree on all the other basic fundamental principles, yet differ on this one matter; then they are at each other's throats, creating strife and division.

So you have to ask this question: Why, then, will one Christian attack another Christian? Why are there variances of faith, when there are variances in the same faith and sometimes in the same faith and practice?

There are answers to these questions, and I am going to attempt to give you some of them. As I do, examine your life to make sure that you are not a source of division or strife.

I will tell you my perspective and what I have told people all through the years. I have often said to brethren who disagree with me, or if I disagree with them, that if there is ever division, strife, animosity, or resentment, it is going to be on their part and not mine. I am not going to be angry with them. I can agree to disagree. I am not going to fuss or fight with them. I am more than willing to teach them and help them, but I am not going to fight with them. Now, you are going to ask me, “Well, have you ever been wrong?”

The answer is yes. I have been wronged by preachers, pastors, and men that I count my friends. Have I ever been hurt? The answer is yes. But I am not going to hold bitterness, resentment, anger, or ill will. When I think of the wrongs that have been done to me, I have to think of the wrongs that I did to Jesus Christ. My wrongs to Christ are far greater than any wrongs anyone has ever done to me. If Jesus Christ forgave me and does not hold bitterness, ill will, or resentment against me for sinning against him, why should I hold those things against someone who sins against me? It is just that simple. My position is that I am not going to argue, bicker, fuss, or fight.

God's Sovereignty

I can agree to disagree and still work with you, still help you. But when we begin to answer why there are so many divisions and so much strife, we must recognize a divine side and a human side. I am going to give you the divine side today. In the next three messages, I will develop what we would call the human side, or Christian responsibility. Today I will show you God's sovereignty.

God's sovereignty and man's responsibility—Christian responsibility—are intertwined; they go together. A few of the Scriptures I show you today I will build upon later, to demonstrate what I am saying. So let us begin by looking at the divine side. As you read the Scripture, you will understand that God's sovereignty runs through everything. Sovereignty is absolute.

God's Sovereignty in Salvation

Every Christian, if he believes the Bible, has to acknowledge that God is absolutely sovereign. Not only does the Bible teach this, but God has to be absolutely sovereign. He has to control absolutely everything. If anything is outside and beyond God's sovereign control, then God is not God. Whatever God cannot control or does not control would be God. Therefore, we have to confess and acknowledge that God is sovereign. There is no two ways around it. We also acknowledge that God is sovereign in salvation. Salvation is the work of God alone.

Man cannot save himself, and man cannot help save himself. Salvation is the work of God. In one sense, the Bible teaches that salvation is a sovereign revelation. Matthew 11:27 says, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father. And no man knoweth the Son, but the Father, and He to whomsoever He revealed Him. Neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and He to whomsoever He revealed Him."

No one can know God the Father unless Jesus Christ reveals Him, and no one can know God the Son unless God the Father reveals Him. The Greek word for reveal is apokaluptō. It literally means to uncover, to lay open that which has been veiled or covered up; to disclose, make known, make manifest, or reveal. No man can know the Son except the Father disclose Him, uncover or unveil Him so that he can see. Likewise, no man can know the Father unless the Son unveils the Father to him.

If the only way a man can savingly know the Father is for the Son to reveal Him, and the only way anyone can savingly know the Son is for the Father to reveal Him, then salvation absolutely has to be a work of God alone, because only God can unveil or uncover Himself.

Illustration: Healing at Bethesda

Our Lord illustrates this point in John 5 with the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda. Around the pool and in the porches lay a great multitude of impotent folk, sick, lame, halt, waiting for the moving of the water. Our Lord walked through this great multitude, singled out one man, and healed him. The man had been lame for thirty-eight years.

Everyone knows that Jesus Christ is God, and Jesus Christ is omnipotent. He could have healed absolutely everyone around that pool and in those porches at one time as easily as He healed the one man. But He did not; He only healed the one man. That man certainly did not deserve healing. Not only did he not deserve healing, he never asked for it. He did not even know who Jesus Christ was. Jesus Christ said, "Will thou be made whole?" He replied, "I have no man to help me. Well, the water's troubled."

"While I'm coming, someone else steps in ahead of me. I have no one." He never asked to be healed. He did not even know who Jesus Christ was. Jesus Christ said, "Take up thy bed and walk," and he did. So here is my question: Why did Jesus Christ single out one man and heal him out of the entire multitude when He could have healed all just as easily? Here is the answer.

Look in John 5 and verse 21. Our Lord says, "As the father raises up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth, whom He will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." Why does the Son quicken whom He will? And why has the Father committed all judgment to the Son? Here is why, verse 23: "That all men should honor the Son even as, that is equally, as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which has sent me."

So Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. What is the one attribute that singles God out as God? It is His sovereignty. He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases. So, as the Father quickeneth whom He will, even so the Son quickens whom He will. Our Lord, in a demonstration of His absolute sovereignty, walks through the multitude, heals one man, and demonstrates that He is God.

The Apostle Paul goes farther and asks three questions concerning salvation, and those three questions again demonstrate that salvation is of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 4 and verse 7, Paul asks, "Who maketh thee to differ from another?" Why are you saved and others are not saved? Why do you know truth and others do not know truth? Why have you been made righteous when others have not been made righteous?

The second question is, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" Everything you have, God gave you. The third question is, "If thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory or boast as if thou hadst not received it?" Who makes you different? What do you have that you have not been given? If God gave you everything, why would you boast as if you had not received it from God? Everything that we have—faith, repentance, grace, mercy, love, goodness, compassion, kindness, and every other virtue of grace—is a gift from God and

comes from God alone. God makes us to differ because God is the one who has given us all His gifts.

God's Sovereignty in Illumination

If you understand that God is sovereign in salvation, you must also understand that God is sovereign in everything else. The same God who is sovereign in salvation is equally sovereign in illumination. Illumination is the act, work, or ministry of God the Holy Spirit whereby He opens our eyes and our understanding, that we may comprehend and grasp the truth revealed in the Word.

Let me make a distinction for you. What I am about to tell you is very important, and it will make a difference if you understand it. There is no more revelation. God is not revealing truth today. Christians often use the word wrongly, saying, "Let me tell you what God revealed to me." No, God did not reveal anything to you. He may have opened your eyes to understand His divine revelation, but He did not reveal anything to you. Revelation has ceased because we have the full, final, and complete revelation of God in the living Word, Jesus Christ, and in the written Word, His Bible.

Revelation is the act of God whereby He reveals truth never known before to the human mind. Stop and think about this. Here is a wonderful example: Who wrote the first five books of the Bible? Moses. Look at Genesis 1 through 4, or even Genesis 1 through 12. How did Moses know what happened at creation? He was not there. How did Moses know what happened between Adam and Eve? He was not there. How did he know what happened when Cain killed Abel, or about the call of God to Abraham and what happened there? The answer is that God revealed it to Moses. Revelation is the act of God whereby God reveals truth never known before to the human mind.

Inspiration then comes along, superintends that revelation, and makes sure that it is written down accurately and truthfully. Revelation, then, is the act of God whereby God reveals truth never known before to the human mind. How can I say that revelation has ceased? The answer is that this is what the Bible teaches. Look in John chapter 1, verses 17 and 18. These verses are very simple. The

Bible says, “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man had seen God at any time.”

"The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him," or he hath revealed Him. "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Do you mean to tell me there was no grace in the Old Testament? Of course there was. The Bible says Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Anyone saved in the Old Testament was saved by grace. Is the Old Testament truth? Of course it is. Everything that God revealed is truth. How then can we say, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"? Because Jesus Christ is the fullness, the completeness, the apex, the highest part of grace and truth. There is nothing above or beyond Jesus Christ. He is the fullness. He is the completeness. He is God in the flesh. There is no further revelation beyond Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:1 says, "God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets." How did God speak to the prophets? Sometimes in dreams, sometimes in trances. God spoke in different ways in the Old Testament. But verse 2 says, "God hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, who is the appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the majesty on high."

So God, in the Old Testament and in the writing of the New Testament, spoke many different ways. When Jesus Christ came, Jesus Christ was the fullness and the completeness of divine revelation. When someone contends for a continuing revelation, saying, "God is revealing truth today," what they are saying is that there is something over and above and beyond Jesus Christ. They are saying He is not the full, final revelation of God. They are saying there is something over and above the Bible, which is accurately described as blasphemy. Jesus Christ is the full and final revelation of God.

God is not giving us any revelation today. We have the completed revelation. What God does is illuminate and enlighten. When you

came into this room and the lights were off, it was dark. When you hit the switch and the lights came on, the room was illuminated so that you could see whatever was in this room.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit as Illuminator

This now is the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In John 15:26, our Lord says, "But when the Comforter is come, the Holy Spirit, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth which proceeded from the Father, He shall testify of me."

In John 16:12-15, our Lord tells His disciples, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth. For He shall not speak of Himself, but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak, and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine. Therefore said I that He shall take of Mine and shall show it unto you."

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to illuminate, to enlighten, and to give us understanding of that truth which has been revealed. When you see something in the Bible, become excited, and say, "God just revealed this to me," no. God just opened your eyes so that you could see what He had already revealed. That is illumination. That is enlightenment.

In Luke 24, our Lord showed this to His disciples: "And He said unto them, 'These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning me.'" Then opened He their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures.

The Scriptures are the revelation. The opening of the eyes, or the opening of the understanding, is illumination. What God does is illuminate our mind so that we can understand the divinely revealed Word of God.

Remember the two on the Emmaus road: "And they talked together of all these things which had happened," and, "And it came

to pass that while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus Himself drew near and went with them, but their eyes were

"Holden that they should not know Him." Their eyes were powerfully closed; they did not recognize Jesus Christ. But verse 31 says, "And their eyes were opened, and they knew Him; and He vanished out of their sight." Verse 31 is analogous to verses 44 and 45, where God opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures. He opened their eyes, and they saw Him and knew Him.

The revelation is the Bible; our understanding of it is illumination. Matthew Henry, speaking of Luke 24 and the two disciples on the Emmaus road, said: "In his discourse with the two disciples, he took the veil from off the text by opening the scriptures. Here he took the veil from off the heart by opening the mind. The design of opening the understanding is that we may understand the scriptures.

"Now listen, not that we may be wise above that which is written, but that we may be wiser in that is written and may be made wise unto salvation by it. The spirit in the word and the spirit in the heart say the same thing. Christ's scholars never learn above their Bibles in this world, but they need to be still learning more and more out of their Bibles and to grow more ready and mighty in the Scriptures. That we may have right thoughts of Christ and have our mistakes concerning Him rectified, there needs no more than to be made to understand the Scriptures."

We do not grow above the Bible. We do not outgrow the Bible. There is nothing beyond the Bible. We must understand what is in the Bible, and the way to understand is through the illuminating work and ministry of the Holy Spirit.

By nature, we do not see and we do not hear. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2:14, speaking of the unsaved man: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. For they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." An unsaved man has no receptors, no capacity to understand the things of God.

Even when we are converted, we are still fleshly. We still have to have our eyes opened. If our Lord had to open the understandings of His disciples, who walked with Him for three years, He would surely need to open our understandings as well. We have to have illumination. Job said it like this in Job 34:23: “That which I see not, teach thou me.” David said it in Psalm 119:18: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” God must open our eyes. That was quite a prayer for David, since David wrote most of the Psalms: “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.”

If you understand that God is sovereign in salvation, you also have to understand that God is sovereign in illumination. God does not give the same truth to all people, nor does He give the same amount of truth to people, nor does He give that truth at the same time. I have had people say, “I would to God I’d understood this twenty years ago.” You understand that sentiment, but you would not have listened twenty years ago. You would not have heard twenty years ago. That is why there is a difference in the understanding and spiritual level of people. You have to understand that God is sovereign in illumination. There are certain people who will understand certain truths, and other people who will not understand those truths. There are people who will hear, and there are people who will not hear.

Spiritual Immaturity Limits Reception of Truth

There are Christians who are not able to hear the truth. Mark 4:33 says, “And when many such parables spake he the word unto them as they were able to hear it.” He spoke as they were able to hear it. Why, when you get around a little baby, do you want to tickle his chin and say, “Kitchy, kitchy, koo,” or make little sounds over that baby? You do not look at that little baby and say, “Now today, I’m going to be talking about dichotomy and trichotomy. And I’m going to explain the difference to you between supralapsarianism and infralapsarianism, and so I want you to listen carefully.” Why? Because the baby is not going to understand a word you are saying like that.

Paul said to the Corinthian Christians, “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat. For hitherto you were not able to bear it,” or to hear it, or to have it, or to eat it. “Neither yet now are you able. For you are yet carnal, for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, or fleshly, and walk as men?” Paul said, “I couldn’t speak to you in spiritual terms. I could not talk about theological concepts.”

Because you're nothing but a baby, you won't take meat. You don't take a T-bone steak and feed it to a two-month-old baby. You just don't do it. The baby has to have milk. And that's what Paul is saying: "You're not able to bear it." Our Lord spake truth as they were able to hear it. You are not able to hear more truth until you obey the truth that you've already heard. Why would God give us more truth if we're not going to obey the truth that is already given to us?

The truth of the matter is, obedience is the very first fundamental, basic foundation of every child, physically or spiritually. The child that will not obey will never learn and will never mature, at least intellectually and morally. It is the same thing when it comes to spiritual things.

The author of Hebrews is talking about the Melchizedek priesthood of Jesus Christ. He says, "called of God and high priest after the order of Melchizedek." Then he says, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, no words are deep, they are theological things, seeing you are dull of hearing."

"For when the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not strong meat. For everyone that useth milk, is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belong to them that are full of age, even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

The apostle says, "I can't teach you anything about the Melchizedek priesthood of Christ. You're dull of hearing. You're a

baby. I can't give you meat. You have to have milk. You're not able to bear it. You're not able to hear it." Truth is only spoken as people are able to hear.

Practical Implications: Patience and Thankfulness

Ask yourself this question: Why is it that some Christians understand a lot of truth, while others understand hardly any truth except that Jesus Christ is the Savior and their salvation is wrapped up in Him? Stop and think about this. Why? I am trying to give you a divine-side answer today. You are going to see that the human side and the divine side are intertwined as we go, because we do have Christian responsibilities. But the fact is, God is sovereign in illumination. He does not reveal the same truth to everybody, nor does He reveal the same truth at the same time to everyone. If He did, everybody would have the same understanding. But not everybody has the same understanding.

Let me try to put things in perspective for you. You have to understand that God is sovereign in illumination. Let us pretend for a moment that I happen to be the best preacher in the entire world. I am the best teacher; I have the best communicating skills imaginable, the best oratory, and the best illustrations. I could be the best preacher and teacher, with the best communication skills, the greatest oratory, and the greatest illustrations.

The truth of the matter is that, no matter how great, good, or thorough I am, if God does not open your eyes, you are never going to see the truth. It is not in man; it is in God. If God withholds you from seeing truth, and you say, “Well, God would not do that,” oh yes, He will, and yes, He does. I will show you before I am through with this series. If God withholds you from seeing truth, there is nothing I can do to open your mind.

The only thing I can do is be patient with you. Turn in your Bibles to 2 Timothy, chapter 2, and let us begin reading with verse 24. Watch carefully: “And the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” The servant of the Lord.

The preacher, the teacher, the pastor, the elder: “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach,

patient, watch, in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will."

When do men recover themselves out of the snare of the devil? When they acknowledge the truth. When do men acknowledge the truth? When God gives them repentance—when God opens their eyes, turns them, and they see. I cannot make anybody see or turn. God tells me that I am to be patient in meekness, instructing those that oppose themselves. My responsibility is to teach. It is God's prerogative to open the eyes, give understanding and repentance, and turn them to the truth.

If I grasp that God is sovereign in illumination and that my responsibility is patiently to teach the truth, it should make me more kind, tender, and patient with those who do not see the truth. I should not abuse, reject, despise, or make fun of them. It should make me more pitiful toward them and more thankful that God has opened my eyes. We cannot do the work of the Holy Spirit. We may pray, teach, and witness, yet we must wait upon Him to open the eyes and understanding. We cannot become bitter, hateful, or resentful toward each other because you do not see what I see, or I do not see what you see. If God is sovereign in illumination, we should be able to agree to disagree and still be kind, loving, and helpful to each other.

It should also make us more thankful for what we do see. Look in your Bibles to Matthew 13, verses 10 and 11. You ought to concentrate on this passage. "And the disciples came and said unto him, 'Why speakest thou unto them in parables?'"

Conclusion: All Understanding Is a Gift

"He answered and said unto them, 'Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.'" Understanding is the gift of God. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in illuminating and enlightening our minds that we may see truth. Others are not given the truth.

Every doctrine that you and I know, understand, and love, every truth that we see and hold dear, was a gift from God. God opened our eyes. He let us see it. He allowed us to embrace it, believe it, and apply it. God does not give the same truth to everyone, nor does he give the same amount of truth to everyone, nor does he give this truth at the same time.

"Who maketh thee to differ one from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? And have you received it? Why do you boast that you have not received it?" Everything that we have and everything that we know, God gave us. God sovereignly allowed our minds to be open so that we could understand his divine revelation. He illuminated us and gave us truth. It ought to make us more thankful when we understand that everything we have was given to us. Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to thee this day.

We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Your truth. We thank You, Father, for Your full, final, and complete revelation in Jesus Christ and in the Word of God. We bow to it, and ask You, Father, to illuminate our minds. Enlighten us that we might understand and comprehend Thy divine and revealed truth, that we may serve Thee acceptably with reverence and godly fear. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

CHAPTER 4

Can We All Just Get Along?

Part Four

Introduction and Review of Previous Messages

Let us open our Bibles to Romans chapter 14. This is the fourth installment and the final message in this brief series, “Can We All Just Get Along?” Romans 14, beginning with verse 1, says, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that

eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.

Let me tie together everything I have given you in the last three messages. In the first message, I pointed out that this title came from Rodney King, who, on May 1st, 1992, was pleading for peace and calm when he asked, “Can we all just get along?” In fact, a dear brother called me quite upset about all the divisions and strife existing among Christians. He asked me why, and I decided to try to answer his question. At first, I intended to do this in one sermon, but then I realized that it was impossible. I want to point out that there are certainly divisions, and a lot of the strife, animosity, and ill will comes from our own stubbornness and wickedness instead of simply understanding these differences. I also pointed out in the first message how the person and work of Jesus Christ actually divides.

You remember I quoted from Luke chapter 12 where he said he came not to bring peace but a sword, and he came to set father against the son, the mother against the daughter, and the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law. As you read through the New Testament, over and over the Bible will say, "And there was a division because of him." So Jesus Christ is the great divider.

He does indeed separate the wheat from the tares, the sheep from the goats, and the righteous from the wicked. So when I am talking about getting along, I am emphasizing again that I am not talking about getting along with infidels, unbelievers, and heretics. No, not at all. I am talking about getting along with people of like faith and practice, where there are legitimate differences. We may have differences, but that does not necessitate divisions.

In the very first message, I began to show how God is absolutely sovereign in illumination. He is not simply sovereign in salvation; He is sovereign in illumination. If God does not open our eyes, we do not see. If God does not illuminate us, we do not understand. If God does not enlighten us, we cannot grasp anything. The Bible teaches that understanding is a gift from God. I quoted 2 Timothy 2:7, where Paul told Timothy, "Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things." Understanding is God's gift, but He does not give that gift willy-nilly. He gives it as we consider what He says. God does not give the same light to everyone, at the same time,

or in the same amount. One answer as to why there are divisions and differences is simply that God is sovereign in illumination.

God does not owe us anything. I quoted Elihu in Job 33:13, where he asks Job, "Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters." The very fact that we understand some things is based only upon God's grace and mercy. Then I began to show the human answer as to why there are divisions.

First and foremost, one of the main reasons is a failure to study. The Bible says in 2 Timothy 2:15, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." The epic failure in Christendom today is that very few really study their Bibles. Many read, but they read out of habit, or simply to say, "I read my Bible." We never really seriously study the word of God.

The second failure is a failure to have a teachable spirit. When a person does not have a teachable spirit, it is impossible to teach him. I gave you the quote from Will Rogers: "It isn't that we do not know that gives us so much trouble. It's what we know that ain't so." So many people know some things that just ain't so. I get tickled when I hear people say, "Well, the Bible says every tub has to sit on its own bottom." Well, the Bible does not say that. "Well, the Bible says God helps those that help themselves." No, the Bible does not say that. The truth is, we think we know, when in reality we do not know. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 8:2, "And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know." Once you think you have the truth, know the truth, and need nothing else, you are never going to be taught anything.

The third failure is a failure to apply and live by biblical principle. I used Mark 4, verses 23 through 25. If we want more truth, we have to be obedient to the truth that God has already given us. That passage also says that if we do not use the truth, we lose the truth. That is the principle: "...from him that hath not shall be taken even that which he hath." And when you get to Luke 8:18, it says, "...even that which he seemeth to have." If we do not use or apply the truth, in reality, we do not really have it, understand it, or grasp it. If we did, we would certainly use it.

The Weaker and Stronger Brethren

In the message last week, in the fourth point, I discussed that major differences occur because we fail to recognize the different levels of maturity in believers. The Apostle John, in 1 John chapter 2, talked about little children, young men, and fathers. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 3, spoke about babies. So you have a baby in Christ, a young child, a young man, and then a father.

A baby is not going to act like a young child, a young child is not going to act like a young man, and a young man is not going to have the wisdom and insight of a father. You have to understand that at every level of maturity there are advantages and disadvantages. The advantage of being a little baby is that you get all the attention. The advantage of being a young child is that you get trained and taught. The advantage of being a young man is that you are strong, and the advantage of being a father is that you have wisdom and insight.

There are also disadvantages. There are many things a baby cannot do, a young child cannot do, and even a strong young man cannot do because he does not have wisdom and discernment.

The fifth failure in our Christian responsibility is the failure to discern the difference between the weaker brethren and the stronger brethren. The weaker brother may be a baby, a young child, or a young man in Christ. But in 1 John 2, John classifies believers as young children, young men, or fathers. In Romans chapter 14, the Apostle Paul classifies believers in two groups: the weak brethren and the strong brethren.

Failure to Discern Between Weak and Strong Brethren

Look in verse 1 of Romans 14: “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things.” That is a strong brother. “Another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not,” which is the strong man despising the weaker brother, “and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth,” which is the weak judging the strong, “for God hath received him.”

Here in Romans chapter 14, you have a division between the weak brethren and the strong brethren. Obviously, there are some that are weak in the faith, and there are some that are strong in the faith. But if you look in verse 1, first, he says, "Him that is weak in the faith receive ye." In other words, we must receive a weak brother as a real brother in Christ.

What does it mean when the Bible tells us to receive each other? What does it mean to receive a brother? Here the Bible tells us we are to receive the weak brother as a brother in Jesus Christ.

Secondly, in receiving him, we must not engage in doubtful disputations. Thirdly, the issues involved in these doubtful disputations are not moral issues, nor are they violations of particular biblical principles. Rather, in the context of Romans chapter 14, these differences have to do with food, with days, the observance of days, or the abstinence of certain foods. In other words, here is something that obviously is a big difference, because you have a weak brother and a strong brother.

I want you to hold Romans 14, but look in your Bibles at the book of Colossians, chapter 2. Begin reading at verse 16. Based upon the word of God, you are going to see that it is the strong brother who knows and understands that these issues have all been settled by the person and work of Jesus Christ. Look in your Bibles at Colossians chapter 2, and notice what the Bible says in verse 16. God says, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat,

“Let no man therefore judge you in meat”—now, without me getting into it, in 1 Corinthians chapter 8 the Apostle Paul talks about individuals who were buying meat from the pagans, and that meat had been sacrificed to a pagan idol. It was being sold at a discount price in the shambles, and the believers were going down and saying, “Man, I’m getting a good piece of steak for 30 cents a pound.” And here’s a weak brother saying, “You’re eating meat that’s been offered to an idol.” So this is why he’s talking about meat. He’s not necessarily talking about the clean and the unclean foods; he’s talking about meat that has been dedicated to an idol. Therefore, “no man judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day.” That is a particular day. You do not observe Easter. You do not observe Christmas.

"Or of a new moon," which, of course, there were new moons in the Old Testament, "or the sabbath days." Notice the days are plural. There was not only a weekly Sabbath, but also a monthly Sabbath and a sabbatical year. The year of Jubilee was also a sabbatical year. But notice what he says about all of these things that refer to meat and drink and holy days and new moons and sabbath days. Watch verse 17: "Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." In other words, everything in the Old Testament was a shadow. It was not real. Jesus Christ is the reality, and Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of all of those types, all of those shadows, and all of those emblems.

The strong man knows the difference. The weaker brother, according to Romans chapter 14, may possess a weakness of faith, but he still loves Jesus Christ. The weaker brethren have been purchased by the precious blood of Jesus Christ as well. He died for the weaker brethren just as He died for the stronger brethren. The stronger are to walk in grace and receive the weaker brother, but not for doubtful disputations that might bewilder his faith.

One author paraphrased verse 1 this way: "Do not admit him to your society for the purpose of debating the matter in an angry and harsh manner of repelling him by denunciation."

The strong brother is not called upon to settle all the scruples of the weaker brother. If Gordon says, "I think you ought to keep the fifth day of the week just like you ought to keep the seventh day of the week," he may hold that view. I am not called upon to settle the differences in his view at that particular time, nor do I have to argue with him over it. I can teach him. He may be taught, but he cannot be reviled; he may be instructed, but he cannot be mocked and ridiculed.

Albert Barnes, speaking of Romans chapter 14, says, "A harsh and angry denunciation of a man in relation to things not morally wrong, but where he may have honest scruples, will only tend to confirm him more and more in his doubts. To denounce and abuse him will be to confirm him. To receive him affectionately, to admit him to fellowship with us, to talk freely and kindly with him, to do him good, will have a far greater tendency to overcome his scruples. The questions which now occur about modes of dress, about measures

and means of promoting revivals, about rites and ceremonies, this is by far the wisest course if we wish to overcome the scruples of a brother and to induce him to think as we do."

If Robert comes up with some far-side idea and I say, "Brother, that is the dumbest thing I have ever heard in my life; how stupid could you be?"

May I ask what kind of effect that is going to have on him? Is that going to tend to say, "Wait a minute, brother, let's think this thing through"? Why would I denounce him in an angry, hateful tone just because I think whatever he is saying is not right? All Barnes is saying is that if I come at him with a different attitude, recognize that he is a brother in Christ, and speak to him calmly, lovingly, and kindly, he is certainly more apt to listen than if I jumped all over him with both feet and told him how absolutely ridiculous he really is. That is all Barnes is saying.

Now look in your Bibles to Titus, chapter 3 and verse 9: "But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain." What does he say? Avoid foolish questions, contentions, and strivings.

In other words, you do not have to get involved. We used to have a saying: "I don't have a dog in this fight." By that we meant, "This is nothing personal to us." Why should we get upset about someone's foolish question or someone wanting a genealogical debate? Why would I get caught up in something like that? It does not really matter. This is what Paul is saying: Avoid things like this.

Now look in your Bibles to Romans 14. Here are the tendencies of both the strong and the weak brethren, and you can see how this would cause divisions and strife. God says, verse 3, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand." The tendency of the strong is to despise the weak. That is why he says, "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not."

The word "despise" literally means to treat with contempt, to despise utterly, and to consider worthless. So here is what Paul is

telling us: it is a tendency of the strong brother to look down upon the weaker brother and consider him childish, immature, silly, ridiculous, and contemptible. "I came through that. I got over that. Why can't you get over that?" Such an attitude certainly does not foster brotherly love, nor does it foster instruction, because a stronger brother is not willing to spend any time with those whom he treats with contempt and thinks are silly, worthless, and ridiculous.

That's just the strong man. Watch verse 3: "Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not," that's the weak brother, "judge him that eateth." So, as the tendency of the strong is to despise the weak, the tendency of the weak is to judge the strong. The weak brother looks at the strong brother who is doing things he does not like or agree with and says, "You can't be a Christian and eat that. You can't be a Christian and think that. You can't be saved and act the way you're acting."

Let me ask you a question. If the strong is unwilling to teach, help, and instruct one whom he despises, do you think the weak will be willing to listen to and learn from someone whom he does not even believe is a Christian?

You see these tendencies, and these tendencies lead to greater strife and division. Those who are strong in the faith must comprehend that you cannot force anyone to see, understand, or comprehend the truth. Truth comes by illumination, not by force. If God does not open the eyes, a man is never going to see it. You may ridicule, mock, and treat someone contemptuously all you like, but you cannot force him to see truth. You cannot look at that young believer or weak brother and say, "Grow up, dummy." It does not work like that. You may want to say that, but it does not work like that.

The weak brother has to comprehend that he does not know it all. He also has to comprehend that what he thinks may not be right and may not be biblical.

We know what we have been told, heard, and taught, but we have never really searched the Scripture for ourselves. That is the weak brother. He knows some things—what he has heard, what he thinks, and what he believes—but he has never really found out. Some

people take weakness and ignorance and think somehow they are virtues.

I had a preacher friend, now dead, whom I tried to work with. There were differences between us, and I explained them. I told him, "I would be more than willing to have you come and work with me, just so you understand one thing: I do not want you fighting against me. We disagree—wonderful, I do not care. But all I would like you to do is sit and listen. If you want to continue to disagree, wonderful; that is up to you and the Lord." A week later, I received a four-page, single-spaced, tightly written letter informing me that he had not changed any of his positions in over forty years and was not about to change now. That letter actually said, "God has not taught me anything in forty years. I have not learned one thing."

We are to be constantly changing because we are to be constantly learning and conforming our lives more and more to the Word of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot live without change. The weak man must realize that the only way he will become strong is to change.

God says, "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." I have friends who believe that we ought to worship on Saturday. I certainly disagree with them for biblical reasons. But if someone says, "I am going to regard this day to the Lord," then to the Lord he regards it. If I do not regard it to the Lord, I do not regard it. He says, "He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks." For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. Then God asks, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth."

Now, if Tom is doing something unbiblical, I can confront him. But if Tom has a little scruple about something that is immaterial, to his own master he stands or falls. It is not up to me to correct every scruple that he has. Sometimes it simply takes time to grow up, and you well know that some children mature much earlier than others. Some Christians mature much earlier than others as well.

The truth of the matter is this: each one of us has deficiencies. Each one of us is certainly deficient in knowledge in a number of areas. But what we do know, we know only by the grace and mercy of God. The truth of the matter is this: God is able to uphold the weakest saint, and God is able to uphold the strongest saint: “To his own master he standeth or falleth.”

So, when it comes to the weaker brother and the stronger brother, make sure you are not arguing. Make sure you are not despising. Make sure that you are not judging as a weaker brother. Here are divisions, and they are there, but there does not necessarily have to be strife because there are divisions, when you recognize these divisions. Sometimes there is a failure in our Christian responsibilities to distinguish between a weak brother and a strong brother.

Failure to Understand Biblical Charity (Love)

The sixth failure in our Christian responsibilities is a failure to understand biblical charity, or biblical love. In 1 Peter 4:8, the Apostle Peter writes, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” Peter is telling us that we are to have fervent charity, for charity is going to cover a multitude of sins.

Proverbs 10:12 says, “Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” Hatred stirreth up strife, but love covereth all sins. Proverbs 17:9 says, “He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends.” As hatred makes the worst of everything, love is entitled to bury things out of sight.

Love is endorsed by God because it is God's own nature. In 1 Peter chapter 4, Peter commends love, or charity, as the first thing because it is the bond of perfection. He also says that this love should be intense, fervent, and vehement. Biblical love covers a multitude of sins. What does that mean? It means that we are willing to overlook the sins of those whom we love.

We are not eager and ready to take offense at every fault in anything they say or do. Everyone has faults. Everyone has sins. If

you do not believe I have them, ask Alice. But when we love someone with biblical love, we are willing to overlook those imperfections. Sometimes Alice has to look at me and say, "Did you hear me?" I will say, "Don't yell at me."

Well, yes, I am hard of hearing, but I still do not want her yelling. I am willing to overlook it because I know I am hard of hearing. After fifty-five years, I am not about to start over, I can assure you. Biblical love tends to make us kind toward the imperfections of others, charitable toward their faults, and often blind even to the existence of those faults. We do not see the imperfections of those whom we love; our attachment to them makes us value their excellencies more than their failures and faults. If we have fervent love, then obviously we will overlook some faults. Adam Clarke said this: "A loving disposition leads us to pass by the faults of others,

A Failure to Understand Forgiveness

Biblical love enables us to forgive offenses against ourselves and to excuse, unless and as far as is consistent with truth, the transgressions of men. I loved my mother, but I could do no wrong in her eyes. I did do wrong, yet my mother would always take up for me. She would discipline me, but she was always willing to overlook those faults in my life.

Biblical love is commanded to continue and is labeled in Scripture as the greatest virtue and the bond of perfectness. Colossians 3:14 says, “And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.” First Corinthians 13:13 says, “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,” or love. Hebrews 13:1 says, “Let brotherly love continue.”

If I love Andrew, I may disagree with him on some things, and I may not even like some of the things that he does, but I am willing to overlook them. He may not like some things that I do, but he is willing to overlook them. If our society does indeed collapse and we have to pull together, we had better be able to overlook each other’s faults, because we all have them.

So why are there divisions? First, we fail to distinguish between the weak brother and the strong brother. Second, we fail to exercise

biblical charity. Here is the seventh failure in Christian responsibility: a failure to understand forgiveness. There are a multitude of verses in the Bible on forgiveness, and I have preached on this subject a number of times.

Failure to Understand Forgiveness

Peter asked our Lord, “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Do not count 490 and say, “That is it. 491. No more.” What our Lord is saying is that you continue with forgiveness. In other words, forgiveness is to be unending.

After our Lord was asked this question by Peter, He continued in verse 23: “Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

“But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

“So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?” Now wait. “And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.”

The interesting thing is this: one servant owed an enormous debt, 10,000 talents; the other, 100 pence. The lord forgave the one of the greatest debt, yet that servant, forgiven such a great debt, would not forgive someone who owed him mere pennies. What does all this mean? Look in verse 35, because our Lord makes the application: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses." So our Lord is saying this.

First of all, forgiveness is mandatory. Secondly, forgiveness should be genuine and sincere. Here is the heart of this parable: if God has forgiven us such a great debt, that which we have sinned against Him, can we not forgive a brother of a much lesser debt who has sinned against us? Stop and think of all the sins you have committed against God—the violations of His law, the wickedness of your sins, the depravity of your heart, and your rebellion—and yet He freely forgave you in Jesus Christ.

If I slip up and say something you do not like, making you angry, and you storm out saying, "I'm just not going to speak to him," then consider this: if God could forgive you such a great debt, could you not forgive me such a small, insignificant debt? That is what He is talking about.

Now let me show you. Turn in your Bibles to Luke chapter 17, beginning with verse 3. Our Lord says, "Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, what are we to do? rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith."

The disciples realized that they needed faith in order to forgive the way our Lord demanded forgiveness.

If Andrew came up and slapped me upside the head and said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to do that, please forgive me," I would be willing to do it. But if he does it a second or third time and still says, "I didn't mean to do that," I might say, "Andrew, you better check your arm for your responses, because the next time you slap me, I won't respond." No, but you see what I am saying?

That is why they said, “Lord, increase our faith.” They realized how difficult this would be according to your flesh and according to your human nature. Our Lord said, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; if he repent, forgive him.” Do you realize that nowhere in the Bible does God demand that we forgive people who do not repent?

Have you ever thought about that? I have known and read, and so have you, of people who murdered a child or a spouse, and then the parent or the other spouse said, “Well, I forgive him.” Really? There has been no repentance? May I tell you something? Not even God forgives without repentance. You cannot come to God without repentance. He is willing to forgive; He is ready to forgive. But there must be repentance. And I have news for you: if Andrew really accidentally slapped me and genuinely repented, he would not be doing it again.

Here is where we fail: “If thy brother sin against thee, rebuke him.” That does not mean jumping all over him with both feet, cussing him out, or telling him off. But it does mean that you can come with a sound rebuke and say, “Brother, do not do that anymore. That’s wrong, that’s wicked. I’m not going to put up with it a second time. Please do not do it.”

We are still talking about repentance and forgiveness. Ephesians 4:31 says, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.” Verse 31 is a put-off verse: put away everything related to bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking. Verse 32 is a put-on verse: “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven you.

Colossians 3:13 gives the same truth: “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.” In Ephesians, we are to forgive one another even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us. In Colossians, we are to forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

Do you understand the implication of forgiving one another even as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven us? Let me draw it out for you.

When God forgave us our sins, He forgot them. The Scripture says He will never remember them against us anymore.

You say, “Brother Weaver, I thought God was omniscient.” He is. He knows all things. Then how can He forget them and never remember them against us anymore? Here is what that means: it does not mean that He obliterates them from His divine mind. He knows all things. But it does mean that He does not hold those sins against us. He does not manipulate us with those sins. He does not hold those sins over our heads, and He does not blackmail us. He acts as if we had never sinned. That is what justified means: just as if I had never sinned. Now, listen carefully.

Husbands and wives are very grievous in this area, as well as practically every Christian. I have heard it, and probably at times I said it many, many moons back. You have heard someone who has been hurt badly look at a brother or sister and say, “Well, I’ll forgive you, but I’m not forgetting.” In that case, you are not really forgiving. Once you forgive as God, for Christ’s sake, forgave you, you forget it.

That does not mean that you have the power to obliterate it from your mind. There are things that happen to me I would to God I could obliterate from my mind, but I cannot. But I can refuse to think about them. I can refuse to speak about them. I can refuse to bring them up anymore, and if they ever come to my mind, I put them back out.

I am not going to waste my time on that. That is over. That is done with. That is forgiven. So when someone asks you to forgive them, that means you put it away. What most wives will do—and husbands are bad about it, too—is this: something will happen, and they will say, “Well, I forgive you.” Then, two or three days later: “I knew you would do it. I knew, I knew, I knew.” It is never forgiven, because you are holding it. When we forgive, we are to forgive as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven us.

We may not have the power to obliterate it from our minds, but we do have the power never to speak about it and not to dwell on it. There are things that have happened in your life which, if you thought on them, if you dwelt upon them, would make you the most

morose, discouraged individual around, because every time you start thinking about them, you get all worked up again.

The Eighth Failure

Failure to Cease Being Hard-Headed and Rebellious

Once you forgive, forget. Do not think about it or speak about it. If it comes up, put it out of your mind.

The eighth failure in Christian responsibilities is failing to cease being hardheaded, stubborn, and rebellious. Think about that. Sometimes, even as Christians, we are just plain mean. It is a failure to have a loving spirit. Unhappily, a few are unsubmissive, hardheaded, stiff-necked, and just plain rebellious.

In that case, the Father will deal with them. We cannot, but He can. If you read Hebrews 12 on chastisement, you will find that when He chastens, it is very effective. You must remember that in 1 John, the Bible does say there is a sin unto death. When someone wants to be plain mean, stubborn, hardheaded, and rebellious, he is asking for the Father to deal with him in chastisement.

Obviously, from Scripture, there will always be differences between Christians: the weak and the strong, the baby, the young child, the young man, and the father. There will always be differences, but there does not necessarily have to be divisions, strife, heartache, bitterness, ill will, and ill feelings if we understand and apply the principles dealt with in these messages.

Applications and Conclusion

We can agree to disagree without being upset with each other. We can agree to disagree and still love and help each other, without bitterness, resentment, and hard feelings. We must understand this basic principle, brought out in the very first message and repeated throughout these messages: if God does not sovereignly open our eyes and illuminate our understanding, we will never see. God does not give the same truth or the same light to everyone. Nor does He give the same amount of truth and light to everyone, nor the same truth or the same amount at the same time to everyone.

Moreover, some Christians will be more diligent in using the means God has ordained—that is, studying, applying, meditating on, and concentrating on truth—and consequently they will be stronger and more advanced. But if we do not want divisions, we must understand our Christian responsibilities. We must study, be teachable, and apply the truth. We must understand the divisions between babies, young children, young men, and fathers, and the divisions between the weak and the strong. We must understand biblical love and biblical forgiveness. We have to cease being plain old mean and hard-headed. God will give us grace as we serve Him, follow Him, and bring our lives into conformity to His word.

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we bow to Thee this day. We thank You for Your word and Your truth. We ask, Lord, that You would indeed teach us, build us up in the most holy faith, help us to live for Thee, and to be holy and godly. In Thy name we pray. Amen.

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JW00433 | SermonAudio

Chapter 2: Can We All Just Get Along? Pt.3
JW00432 | SermonAudio

Chapter 3: Can We All Just Get Along? - Part 1 of 4
JW01502 | YouTube

Chapter 4: Can We All Just Get Along? Pt.4
JW00431 | SermonAudio

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