

Theological and Relational Unity

(Elder's Conference—2019)

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Good afternoon everyone! For those of you that don't know who this person is up here, I'm Canuck, otherwise known as Canadian I am from Western Canada; Alberta, Canada, in a small city called Lethbridge, about two hours south of Calgary, if you know your Canadian geography you can sort of relate to that. We're about one hour east of the Rocky Mountains, one hour north of the American border bordering Montana, and two hours south of Calgary, the major city that we fly out of when we come to the conference,

I give you greetings from all the Canadian brothers were scattered all over the big country. Of course, I'm trying to look after a country that's about 3,800 miles across. Not even sure how many miles north and south but we try to get around her as best I can at intervals and visit with a brethren.

I'm going to reveal something very astounding right now: *we are all human!* And more astounding than that is that *we're all carnal!* We have a carnal nature about us, that we are constantly fighting in our battle, in our conversion process, in the growth that we are trying to attain to develop that mind of Christ.

We are so blessed that God has called us, the 'deplorable' as was referenced earlier, to be called out of this world. But more importantly, also that we have been given the responsibility that a lot of other people would never have that opportunity: *to become teachers, to become shepherds to feed the flock!*

For us to succeed in this, we need to be a unified body. Just as we are under Christ, we need to be a unified body, whether we are the brethren serving each other, or the elders and the leaders of the Church. It's so critical that we are unified as a group, that there's no division. Unity we've heard countless times even for the people that have been in Worldwide for years. Unity amongst the brethren, and unity in the Church.

The importance of unity has always been stressed, but really hasn't existed in our past experience. It's a topic that very rarely really is taken seriously. Unfortunately, over most of our experiences in the Church, there has been a lack of unity. Now we can carry them one step further: Unity amongst the brethren, forming the Church, the Body of Christ is important, but also, we as leaders and elders in God's Church *must have unity amongst ourselves*, we must be unified in doing the same thing:

- doctrinally sound in what we teach
- doctrinally sound in what we learn
- to be able to share that and feed and serve the flock

It's a critical part of the Body of Christ, and that body is one, one body, and so we should also be; striving to be working and developing constantly the mind of Christ.

Let's begin by defining the qualities of an elder. We've gone through this Scripture numerous times, especially when we've been considered as an elder or a leader in the Church of God.

1-Timothy 3:1: "Faithful *is* the saying, 'If any man aspires to *be* an overseer, he desires a good work.' Now then, it is obligatory *that* the overseer be blameless, *the* husband of one wife, vigilant, serious-minded, respectable, hospitable, skillful in teaching; not given to much wine, not a bully, not greedy for selfish gain; but kind, not a quarreler, not a lover of money... [all the qualities that an elder should have] ... one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in subjection with all respect; (For if a man does not know *how* to rule his own household, how will he take care of *the* Church of God?) Not a novice, lest he become conceited *and* fall into *the same* condemnation as the devil. It is mandatory that he also have a good report from those *who are* outside *the Church*, **lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil**" (vs 1-7).

Those are the qualities that God has instructed eldership to consist of!

So, going back to unity, what is unity? *Unity is defined as **the state of being one, oneness!*** The unity of spirit, as referred to in the Scriptures, *is the oneness* that subsists between Christ and the saints, by which the same spirit dwells in both. Both have seen this position and aims. It's the oneness in Christians among themselves, united under the authority of God the Father through Jesus Christ. God calls on his people to be unified with one another (Psa. 133:1).

1-Corinthians 1:10: "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; rather, *that* you be knit together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

It's clearly defined what we are to do as elders in the Church.

1-Corinthians 12:12: “For even as the body is one and has many members, yet, all the members of the one body, though many, are one body; so also is Christ... [clearly defined] ...For indeed, by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondmen or free—and we were all made to drink into one Spirit” (vs 12-13).

Ephesians 4:3: “Being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” *With unity, we do it in a peaceful manner!*

Verse 11: And He gave some as apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for *the* work of *the* ministry, for *the* edifying of the Body of Christ” (vs 11-12).

That's us! It's describing what we should be doing as part of our job description.

Developing unity and friendships just amongst ourselves, in the eldership, and also a leading members in the Church. It's very critical for the health of the congregations and brethren that we feed and serve. The way that the elders of the Church relate to each other, can clearly reflect the state of the body, the Church of God and it's can be reflected more so to the congregation that we are serving. It's just something that happens! Disharmony at the top will create serious divisions in the body, and that can be easily transferred down to the brethren in one fashion or another.

Paul's admonishment to Timothy in 1-Timothy 5:22: “Do not be quick to lay hands on any man... [ordination; coming to the point] ...neither take part in *the* sins of others. Keep yourself pure.” *As elders must keep ourselves pure!*

No elders are hastily ordained, it's a process, Just like our process sitting in the congregation. It's a calling that we originally had, and God saw something in each one of us that He thought that he could work with us to be a shepherd to the flock.

How do we as elders preserve the unity amongst us? This is very important, and cannot be taken lightly by anyone in this room. We must be united in:

- the Truth
- sound doctrine
- the Word of God

Otherwise, our efforts for unity will prove to be superficial and vain. The Apostle Paul in writing to the doctrinally sound Philippians didn't delight of the theological unity, refused to admonish these believers to pursue the ***relational unity!***

Rather, it was for the very reason that they

were united around the Truth of the Gospel that Paul instructed them to pursue the ***relational unity*** and like-mindedness.

Philippians 1:27: “Only conduct yourselves worthily of the Gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you, or am absent, I may hear the reports about you; that you are standing fast in one spirit, striving together with one soul for the faith of the Gospel, and not being intimidated in any way by those who oppose *the Gospel*; which to them is a demonstration of destruction, but to you of salvation, and this from God; because it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His name's sake; experiencing the same conflict that you saw in me, and now hear of concerning me” (vs 27-30).

Philippians 2:1: “Now then, if *there be* any encouragement in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of *the* Spirit, if any *deep* inner affections and compassions, fulfill my joy ***that you be of the same mind***... [so critical] ...having the same love, being joined together in soul, minding the one thing. *Let* nothing *be* done through contention or vainglory, but in humility, each esteeming the others above himself. Let each one look not *only* after his own things, but *let* each one also *consider* the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which *was* also in Christ Jesus; Who, although He existed in *the* form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, *and* was made in *the* likeness of men, *and* took the form of a servant; and being found in *the* manner of man, He humbled Himself, *and* became obedient unto death, even *the* death of *the* cross. Therefore, God has also highly exalted Him and bestowed upon Him a name, which *is* above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow took the form of a servant, of *beings* in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord to *the* glory of God *the* Father” (vs 1-11).

We know for sure that the ***doctrinal unity*** is priority in our lives. Most important! Doctrinal unity based strictly on the Word of God provides the grounds for the genuine ***true relational unity*** that should exist amongst us. It should be a fault common goal for each of one of us in this room to:

- feed the sheep
- serve the brethren
- lead the lambs
- be true stewards of Christ

So important for us to really take that to heart, brethren and elders, wives, and leading men in this Church of God, that we maintain that as a priority in our journey. We have a long way to go,

we've got lots of weaknesses. As I said, we are all human, we all have carnal nature that we must constantly battle. But with God's help and the Holy Spirit working within us, we can win that battle!

We have been selected, we have a purpose, we have a job description, we have a scope of *things that we must accomplish, to achieve what God wants of us: to serve the brethren and feed the sheep!*

How do we promote and protect this unity amongst us as a group? That is the question we must continually ask ourselves on a continual basis for our ministry and our leadership of the fellow brethren around us. All the brethren come from different walks of life, different situations, and we can say that of ourselves. We are not the elite group in here. We are just average Canadians, Americans, New Zealanders and Aussies; can't leave them out. We're all just average people. God has selected us! What a blessing that is, that *we*—amongst all the people in the world—has been selected; this select group—to begin to work with God's people.

- What must we do here as a group?
- What must we do to be unified one spirit?

1. **pray regularly for the spiritual good and joy of each of the elders, or leading men of the Church**

This is essential in forging a unity that will endure on to the end. Staying focused on the purpose that we have been called to do. The primary culprits to unity in the Church, whether it be at the stage of brethren amongst themselves, but more importantly amongst us, is:

- bitterness
- suspicion
- anger
- pride
- selfish ambition

grows quickly and pervasively in prayerless hearts!

That's one thing we must avoid. But if we commit ourselves to intercede regularly for the spiritual prosperity that we have been given, and the joy of each elder that has been assigned to our team, we will find it difficult to stray away and to get away from the job description that we have been called to do.

2. **conduct discussions concerning the practical and the doctrinal disagreements that may come up on occasion**

Keeping in mind that sound doctrine is what everything is based on. We must treat the other

members of the team, the team that we're working with, continuously *with respect, straightforwardness, and a willingness to hear their side*, and a willingness to admit, which is very difficult sometimes, that one is wrong for whatever the case may be.

Even with the commitment to pray regularly for the other elders, we may find that disagreement, misunderstandings and a myriad of other problems will at times come our way and find their presence amongst the strongest team of elders.

- How do we deal with this?
- How do we deal with these troubles that come up?
- What makes the difference between enduring a short live unity?

We must be strengthened by what we have learned, by the doctrine that we know and expound upon that; go back to the basics if we tend to slip away. All things should be discussed, even if there is some unsurety amongst us, or some disagreements that may come up, *we must mitigate those, but not cause disunity at the same time!*

So, a subsection under this second point of conducting discussions, is, first of all, *respect each other!* We have here sitting in this room have been selected by God to be teachers and leaders in the Church of God. So, it's necessary that *we must respect each other* sitting in this room. Be willing to hear and listen to others when exchanging ideas. If we're unwilling to listen to the other side, it demonstrates that we may not be able to articulate our view with clarity and substance, that we do not respect our fellow elders around us to hear their position.

Scripture tells us that is foolishness. Wisdom listens carefully to the other person in order to get the facts straight, and spiritually grow in understanding, even if it about a position with which one disagrees. Wisdom is so critical, as we heard yesterday from Doral, using wisdom, having that ability to use wisdom goes a great, great way in being a good elder, or leader of the Church.

Proverbs 18:2: "A fool has no delight in understanding, but only that his heart may discover itself."

Verse 13: "He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him."

Be straightforward with each other. In dialogue in any dialogue that we have with each other, we cannot mistake fear of man, for humility. We must be ready to present our ideas and concerns honestly and clearly, regardless of what the other

elders think of us. We must be careful, of course not to be cowardice. Because when one is silent, we could show that we are not courageous enough to offer our thoughts for the fear of ridicule or opposition.

Willingness to admit that we are wrong at times is the most difficult thing for us to do! A man characterized by humility, won't refuse to speak straightforwardly and truthfully. But he must admit when he has done something wrong, that he has been wrong in something that he has said. Humility that we show is so critical to maintain that unity amongst us.

3. seek reconciliation quickly after a fracture occurs amongst us, after a fracture occurs in the relationships between us

Despite the commitment to Christ, to the good of the Church of God, to *the theological and relational unity* that we strive for, we must be careful as elders not to refuse reconciliation when the opportune time comes. There will be times that we are at odds with each other, for whatever reason, but that just plays into Satan's hands. He just loves to exploit that kind of situation. So we must be very careful that we don't get entrapped by the this occurring to us.

Ephesians 4:26: "When you become angry, do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger; neither give place to the devil" (vs 26-27).

The Satan the devil just thrives on that occurring in our lives. We must fight that! We must be careful not to be entrapped. That is so difficult for so many of us to do at times when our carnal nature gets in the way. Satan will work mightily to prolong the distance between us when there are difficulties, when we're at odds with each other and deepen the fracture that is there.

In order to preserve the health amongst us, as the eldership team, the leading members of the Church, each member must own their own be committed to complete the prompt reconciliation required. Not a superficial or false or fake reconciliation, but a true reconciliation with the other individual. This should occur after the fracture occurs, and not be prolonged over any long period of time. It only damages the cause that much more, and opens the door for disunity.

4. be careful not to let the other elder's personal idiosyncrasies, or whatever you may call it, bother you

Every unique individual sitting in this room has unique characteristics, and unfortunately, may

have unique bad habits, whatever that may be. What may not be so obvious is the eroding effect that the unchecked annoyance gets in the way of us being able to actually accomplish what we're trying to accomplish.

People get annoyed by somebody scratching their head, picking their nose, whatever the case may be, and lose the importance of what actually is being taught. We all are unique in that respect. We have habits that we just try to constantly battle to overcome. But we should not concentrate on those weaknesses that you see in others. that begins the form of judging one based on some idiosyncrasy that they may have, or habit that they may show.

5. be careful not to speak poorly of an elder to another elder

So critical! It has destroyed countless men and leadership qualities of that occurring. Do not speak poorly of one elder to another elder amongst ourselves.

When a major decision needs to be made an obvious divisions are present, or obvious among the team members, we will be tempted to walk poorly to other elders and talk about them. The opposition becomes a defensive weapon, we must be careful that we don't lead directly again into Satan's hands. He just thrives on that, that the eldership cannot get along with each other, that there's division in the leadership, which basically has an effect on everything beneath that to the membership that we are serving.

We must be careful not to cater to that. It's so important! We are to be a cohesive group of individuals teaching, doing what we have been called to do. We have to be strengthened by the Word of God that enlightens us in how we should conduct ourselves, and how we should conduct ourselves with each other. Allowing God at all times to direct us the entire way and direct us by the lead of the Holy Spirit. That's working within us.

6. do not entertain a church member's complaint of gossip about another elder, but direct the complaining person to speak directly to the elder involved

Defend your fellow elder when appropriate. Such a temptation must be vigorously resisted. At any time that that occurs. I'm not talking about sinful behaviors that appear, but other areas that does come up.

Paul is clear that such charges against elders cannot be entertained, unless on the evidence, of course, of two or three witnesses. As you can read:

1-Timothy 5:19: “Do not receive an accusation against an elder, except on *the testimony of two or three witnesses.*”

That's the principle that we're instructed from the Word of God, and how to deal with situations like that. So with these points and there may be many more. Why do I ask:

- Is there unity amongst the elders in this group? *It's a question that we must seriously look at!*
- Is there unity amongst the elders?
- Why is it so important?
 1. because it honors Christ, who prayed for the unity of the people (John 17:22-23).
 2. because the health of the eldership team will inevitably dictate the health and the happiness of the congregations that we serve.

The brethren that we care for, we serve, and we must feed them and be examples unto them. It is difficult to imagine that any church truly thriving under an eldership who is fractured with bitterness, unresolved disagreements and obvious disrespect to each other, that they will succeed in the purpose that they've been called to do.

On the other hand, when the leaders, the teachers, the servers, the servants are unified and demonstrate a true love and respect for each other, those qualities will make the unity work.

Traits of an Elder

What are the traits that an elder should clearly demonstrate to pursue the true unity amongst each other, and carry that over to the congregations and the brethren that they serve? Probably the most important is:

➤ **Humility**

Ephesians 4:2: “With all humility and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; **being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**” (vs 2-3).

That's what we are here for. That's what we should be concentrating on. That's what we should rehearse constantly. And that's what we should be reminded of, when we come to the Elder's Conference.

➤ **Patience**

Philippines 1:6: “Being confident of this very thing, that He Who began a good work in you will complete *it* until *the day* of Jesus Christ.”

➤ **Honesty**

Being honest, first of all, with God, Jesus Christ, being honest with ourselves, and being honest to our fellow elders and leaders in the Church.

With that said, we should also have the trust that we can be unified, believing the same thing, and teaching in the same manner, with the Spirit working within us.

➤ **Encouragement**

We must encourage each other, encourage one another. There are many times that an elder gets pushed up against the wall. We must encourage them, keep them focused on the importance of the goal that we've been called to do. *Encourage them that we are chosen specially to do that!*

➤ **Love**

Probably the most important trait that we should have. The character trait that ***protects all unity***: love.

1-Corinthians 13:4: “**Love is patient and is kind; love envies not, does not brag about itself, is not puffed up.**”

That's what we are striving to do. You can read it that in Eph. 4:1-16.

While elders are called to love and shepherd the flock, the ability to do this begins with the love and care that we have for each other. Our hope as elders is that the people that formed the Church of God, the brethren that we serve and we care for the people, the brethren that we love, *we should be an example by how we interact with each other is to show the love just amongst us, as leaders and elders in the Church!*

Hebrews 13:7: “Remember your leaders who have spoken the Word of God to you, considering the outcome of *their* conduct; *and imitate their* faith.”

Everything that we do here today, everything that we do as we go back home, we must be faithful unto the end, using the words that we have been taught through God's Word, and practicing it and applying it to our everyday lives.

So, my fellow team members, ***the blessing of the elder relationships is one to be cherished and nurtured!*** There's something special about being unified in the trenches of the ministry, with Godly men pursuing the glory of God. Maybe continue to be striving and faithfully pursuing these

characteristics mentioned in this sermon today. As a team, we are God's team, a Godly team that we can enjoy his grace and be found faithful to His ministry.

So in conclusion, my fellow team members, let us take these things to heart. It's never too late. Let us stay focused on what we have been called and instructed to do. The special calling that we have received directly from God, given to each one of us as elders and as leaders:

- to be shepherds to our flock
- to feed the sheep
- to care for the sheep
- to have compassion for the brethren that we are serving
- to be stewards based on the principles of developing the mind of Christ

Let us strive as elders in Christ, as part of the Body of Christ fulfilling our role. Our job, as we have been called to do, as elders in Christ, ***we do in truth and with the love of God!*** Let us be examples to the brethren we serve, and to each other exemplifying the power of the Holy Spirit working within us as Christ has commanded us to do. Let us be strengthened by

- what we know
- what we have learned
- what we are taught by Fred
- by what we are taught by each other

*Let us be strengthened by that! We can still learn and be true stewards of Christ, in love and harmony, ***being united God's Word and His way.*** Let us let God lead us through Christ and remember that ***united we stand, divided we fall!****

Scriptural References:

- 1) 1 Timothy 3:1-7
- 2) 1 Corinthians 1:10
- 3) 1 Corinthians 12:12-13
- 4) Ephesians 4:3, 11-12
- 5) 1 Timothy 5:22
- 6) Philippians 1:27-30
- 7) Philippians 2:1-11
- 8) Proverbs 18:2, 13
- 9) Ephesians 4:26-27
- 10) 1 Timothy 5:19
- 11) Ephesians 4:2-3
- 12) Philippians 1:6
- 13) 1 Corinthians 13:4
- 14) Hebrews 13:7

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Psalm 133:1
- John 17:22-23
- Ephesians 4:1-16

NB:bo

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