

Sermon Notes
(A basic transcription with modifications for style and clarity)

TURNING THE HEARTS

Marshall Stiver, January 21, 2023

Have you ever gotten a new book and opened it up at the end and not at the beginning?

Today I'd like to begin, not necessarily at the very end of the Bible but in principle, at the end of its purpose. John 17 goes to the heart and core of what was on Christ's mind during His physical lifetime He spent here:

John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;

21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one:

23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

What Jesus Christ experienced His entire physical lifetime is summed up in these verses. This was the result. This is what he was shooting for. This story of His purpose in life and our Father's purpose could be told in this framework. But that's not our purpose.

He was praying for the disciples whom He had taught and whom He had loved personally. And He was praying for those of us as well who would come after them just as He said, "down through the generations."

Why did Christ come here in the first place? It was so that humanity could come to have the same love and oneness He and His Father have and that we could have it among ourselves and with them. He came to make possible what was the original intention in the Garden of Eden when God first made man. Of course, family was the original intention, the increase of God's own spirit composed family. That was the intention from the very beginning.

But not family as it is known on the physically minded human level. In other words, not the kind of family that we see all too much of today which is fractured, dysfunctional families that are angry. People are discontent.

Christ came to begin the unifying process of family on the God-level. Christ in us through the Holy Spirit will begin and ultimately complete that process as we yield ourselves to His Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead us. This was our Father's and Christ's plan from the very beginning and now near Christ's physical end the unity of His spiritual family was uppermost in His mind. If we could come down to one thing in our lives that was uppermost that's what was in His – family. The unity of the family.

I want you to listen to the Albert Barnes Commentary concerning John 17:23.

“It is worthy of remark here how entirely the union of His people occupied the mind of Jesus as He drew near to death. He saw the danger of strifes and contentions in the church. He knew the imperfections of even the best of men. He saw how prone they would be to passion and ambition; how ready to mistake love of sect or party for zeal, for pure religion; how selfish and worldly men in the church might divide His followers, and produce unholy feeling and contention; and he saw, also, how much his would do to dishonor religion.”

There's a lot for us to think about, a lot for us to recognize instantly from this commentary. The greatest dishonor of disunity was the fact that it didn't reflect God's glory. That's what we are here for, to reflect God's glory and to come into this relationship that He and His Father have.

How would others in the world possibly believe that Christ had even been sent and that God our Father was even real if there are contentions and divisions among His people? How could the world know it? They couldn't. How would anyone be able to believe that pure religion even existed at all? These are just straightaway questions that we need to think about.

If there is no evidence of the oneness and, therefore, the love that is perpetual between our Father and Christ, among men, then all credibility of God in man's eyes is destroyed. I want you to think about that. We used to think that a nuclear holocaust would destroy humanity off the earth. But humanity can be destroyed this way too: when there is no love. Christ said that all men would recognize Christ's disciples by their love for one another. That's what makes God's people discernable to the world around.

It's not by what we say or how we say it. It's whether we practice God's will as far as love being recognizable.

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’

23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

When we think about it, the public proclamation of God’s word, of His way of life, of the plan of salvation, along with the casting out of demons or perhaps the healing of the sick, or great counsel or whatever the case may be, these all sound like things that would come from servants of God. And, in fact, they are if they are done according to God’s will.

We could ask ourselves when would any of these things not be according to His will? These are good things! These are things we all desire to see. But if they are done through selfish passion and selfish ambition rather than to glorify Christ’s name, they are against His will.

If these things cause some to mistake love for the man, the sect, the party, or the organization, or pure religion, then they’ve been done against God’s will. If any of these things are done from a self-glorifying heart, divide Christ follows and produce unholy feelings and contention in Christ’s own body, they are against God’s will. That’s putting it just as straight and simple down the middle as I can put it.

What it comes down to is this: whether knowingly or unknowingly, any of us can do wonderful things within God’s one Church that have nothing do to with glorifying God, because knowingly or not, we’ve sought our own glory and not Christ’s, who is our Head. That doesn’t mean that that’s all that happens. I’m just saying this is what can happen and has happened from time to time.

If we seek Christ’s glory, then we don’t care about our status among men. It’s not important to us. The important thing to us is to be able to contribute to the body, to serve, which is what Jesus Christ came here to do. He came to serve. That’s what He tells us as we think about the Passover season as well. Is that why we’re here? David said:

Psalms 1:6 For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

God can read each one of us like a book, which is a good thing. A lot of us can read our children like a book as to whether we seek His glory or whether we seek our own within the body of Christ. He can read it a mile away.

Why would we seek His glory? What’s so special about God’s glory? It’s because He is the personification of love that proclaims to the world that Christ truly came and that He and our Father are real, and their plan of salvation is true. It is a gospel message in itself.

It is the first half of the gospel message by means of public proclamation. It is the thing that makes the public proclamation vital and alive and believable because we do reflect the love of God within us. That's what makes it believable and credible.

Basing our thought solely on God's word and not our own reasoning, let's very logically follow a scenario through to a very logical, spiritual conclusion. This is hypothetical.

Let's say that someone new has just come into God's one Church. We can remember what it was like after being baptized and receiving the Holy Spirit. When we were young in the faith we were fascinated with every aspect of God's way of life, of His truth. We learned that the Church was the pillar and ground of the truth when we first came in. So, we looked to the Church to give us guidance, to help us to grow.

So, a person very much like we were just after baptism, has just come into the Church. This individual is enthusiastic and soaking up all the truth that he can. God's people like to talk, and in the natural process of milling around with brethren, he soon learns that there are other groups with the name Church of God that keep the Sabbath, the Holy Days, and commandments of God. He thinks to himself, "Whoa! This is great! This is exciting!"

Shortly thereafter, in some cases, he learns that he must make a choice. It's either us or them. Then he begins to reflect because he was just baptized very recently; he knows that he wasn't baptized into any organization or denomination. He remembers it very clearly. He was baptized into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, by and through the authority of Jesus Christ, whom our Father has made Head of His one Church.

So, what is this new convert going to do? I'm going to give you two possibilities to consider. He might say, "Well, I guess I'll be one of us. I guess I'll stay here." You see, he's been set up to mistake love of sect or organization for being zealous. He'll think it's pure religion. We understand how a mind can be tainted by that. Instead of love and oneness, he's become a part of division and contention, without even realizing it.

On the other hand, this new babe in Christ may say "This us or them thing is NOT of the truth. That's not what the Bible says. The Church of God is the pillar and ground of the truth; therefore, this can't be God's Church." Sounds logical! We can see why love and oneness was uppermost in Christ's mind before He suffered for us in our place!

When we look at the truth and not our own carnal reasoning, we can literally see how it is that Christ might say to us, "Depart from me, you who work iniquity." Division and contention are what Satan stirred up among one third of the angels. It wasn't of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't of God. It was of Satan the devil. Whether it's among men or among angels it's the same thing.

We know our connection to our Father is through His Spirit.

Romans 8:12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

We weren't called to continue to live as we used to, in other words, in the context of what we're talking about today – maneuvering for position or recognition or prominence. We were not called for that at all! We were called to use God's Holy Spirit to overcome those carnal impulses that Satan broadcasts through the air. We were called to conquer that.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

We need to reaffirm that in our minds constantly! This is God's description of who is His. The sons (children of our Father) are such because they are led by the Holy Spirit not by their own carnal, arrogant will. That's the difference. To be led means to be eager to follow a new course. And that new course is simply to overcome our own will, our own ego, our own pride through to our life's end and to become one with each other as well as with our Father and Christ.

15 For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by [which] we cry out, "Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit [Itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

The Spirit that one of our Father's children receives is one of sonship or adoption so that we can say "Abba, Father" in the very same way that Christ did when He prayed and He asked His Father, through whom all things are possible, to take away the cup He'd been given if it was His will. Jesus Christ yielded Himself to our Father's will.

That word 'Abba' is an Arabic word that expresses filial affection, in other words, family affection, close family affection, much as we might say 'Daddy' to our physical father or 'Dad' as we mature.

Abba expresses the love of a child to a father and that child's willing submission to the father's will. When our little children say to us, "yes daddy" that means they're going to do what you've instructed them. "Yeah. I'm in." And when we get older and we say, "Yes Dad," we're in! That's what's intended to happen.

But even we who've received the Holy Spirit by which we can cry out 'Abba, Father,' can struggle to stay close to Him. Those led by the Holy Spirit will be eager to follow a

new course. Sometimes we're not easily led. And that's the problem. We all understand, we know that innately from our own lives.

We don't need to turn to Revelation 3 to read about God's Church in Laodicea because we know it well. It's of keen interest especially in this time that we live. They thought they were spiritually rich and in need of no course corrections. No leading necessary. That's in essence what was wrong in Laodicea. No leading necessary. They knew where they were going. And all the while they were like tepid water in Christ's mouth. Christ said He would spit out that tepid water if they didn't change. I used tepid because it's a synonym with lukewarm. They mean the very same thing. But one of the words used to define tepid is unenthusiastic, which means showing little enthusiasm.

The definition of enthusiasm is eagerness, keenness, ardor, fervor, passion, zeal, zest, gusto, energy, vigor, vehemence, fire, spirit. Automatically, the first words that come to your mind, God! God our Father and our Elder Brother Jesus Christ. That's Them! This word enthusiasm – en means in and Theos means God. So, enthusiasm essentially means God in you. God in you. God in us occurs by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and, by eagerly allowing it to lead us down a new course instead of blindly staying on the tepid self-willed course that we were on.

The Church of God in Laodicea was struggling to stay close to our Father and therefore to Jesus Christ simply because they have chosen their own course and "they're sticking to it." They can't even see that there's another course. Not yielding to the Holy Spirit, which would be God in them, there was too much of self in them.

We, the greater Church of God, in its many scattered groups today, to be really honest, we are this wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked group of called out ones. That's the timeframe we're living in when we look at the book of Revelation chapters 2 and 3. We're living in that timeframe and we're living in the conditions that are defined by Jesus Christ concerning Laodicea. Christ says to Laodicea, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten, therefore be zealous and repent."

But repent of what? What should we repent of in this situation that we're living in today? Again, this is relative to each one of us so don't think I'm talking down on a blanket level. What do we repent of brethren? Living in the time that we do. We repent of a lack of God in us!

A lack of God in us destroys unity and it destroys oneness. It destroys the thing that Jesus Christ and God the Father planned out and sent Christ here, that He died for so that we could have what They have.

Malachi 4:5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

Some say that fathers refer to civil leaders or religious leaders in the world. Often when we read these verses, it is regarding physical fathers and their physical children and rightly so because the physical family is a microcosm of God's family. That's what God's producing.

We know that the breach that exists in physical families needs to be healed. But there's another application in the physical, spiritual realm that is crying out for our attention. Let's take note that if the hearts of the fathers are not turned to the children and vice versa, then God would have to strike the earth with a curse. The word curse means extermination. This is not a lightweight kind of a curse. Extermination or utter destruction is what the word means.

We could logically ask, "How can that be when Christ Himself said that for the elect's sake, He would stop mankind from total destruction." The only logical answer is that if the hearts are not turned, there will be no elect. If the hearts are turned there will be some elect. What I'm saying, brethren, that our ears must be open to God's warning through Malachi! It's intended for us. Jesus Christ came for a specific purpose and the Church of God is to be the reflection of the unity and oneness and love between Christ and our Father. That's what we're here for.

This prophecy is for those who are God's intended elect, that in the days just preceding the Day of the Lord, are in a horribly dysfunctional state. We know it's true. Something like four hundred splinters since the death of Mr. Herbert Armstrong. There is a breach between the fathers and the children.

We can ask ourselves, who are these fathers and children that are so critical to human survival because they are? Paul says:

1 Corinthians 4:14 I do not write these things to shame you, but as my beloved children I warn you.

Clearly Paul addresses both categories right here. We all, ministry, and members alike, are God's children. Every one of us. But Paul refers to the brethren as his beloved children. And this is of course very consistent with what he wrote to Timothy concerning the qualifications of an elder. He said that if a man didn't guide his own children well then how could he take care of the Church of God? So, the correlation should be very clear. Between a spiritual father with a little "f" and with the people that he cares for. There's a direct correlation.

15 For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus, I have begotten you through the gospel.

We know enough about the life of the Apostle Paul to know that he wasn't trying to make himself into a father with a capital "F". He emphasizes the heart and the tone of his service to the Church. That's what he's trying to convey. He's saying that Christ used him to point others to God the Father.

There is a very clear and special link between a spiritual father with a little "f" and the children that he cares for. In the previous verse he said, "my beloved children". That indicates a special relationship. He had a great deal of care. It expresses the kind of fatherly affection that a physical father would have towards his own kids. A physical father that turns his heart toward his children does it for one reason. It's because he loves them. He wants to have an impact in their life. He wants to help them.

They will in turn, depending on their own choices, likely turn their heart to their physical father who then can point them toward their heavenly Father. That was the main function of the family unit. It's all about the development of God's family.

Brethren, the possibility exists today that if we don't heal the breach between the physical, yet spiritual fathers and the physical, yet spiritual children that there would be no elect and that there would be a curse, utter destruction.

16 Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

17 For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.

Paul is carrying this parent theme as he says to imitate him. Children quite naturally imitate their parents. They imitate our facial expressions or posture or do things that we do. It's very normal. It's predictable and it's rewarding when they have a good example to follow. Paul also said:

1 Corinthians 11:1 Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.

It's 'as I imitate Christ'. That's what Paul was doing. And recall what Christ said of Himself:

John 5:19 ..."Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner.

Jesus Christ set the example for us, following the Father's example. Paul followed Christ's example and the brethren were to follow Paul's. The ministry is to point brethren to Christ and ultimately to the Father just as Paul and Christ did.

There's always an automatic response to this in every one of our minds. That automatic response is, "Well our Father and Christ are perfect but physical men given a

spiritual fatherly role to fill are not perfect.” That is true as true can be and that’s why Paul said, “Follow me as I follow Christ.” That’s an important caveat.

What we need to realize is that the ministry and membership have a mutually dependent relationship. We can’t go it alone because we weren’t intended to. There is a purpose for each of us. Each of us depends on the other to be complete. If you look at our Father and Christ, Christ was talking about their unity. They work in unison. They work together in total harmony. And that’s what a husband and a wife work toward throughout their lifetime as a married couple. There is a harmony between them that can only exist in love perfected. We must strive for that harmony.

For a minister or a member to look at the other and say, “I don’t need to be one with you,” or for a minister to minister to say it or a member and a member to say it, it’s just not true.

Again, that being said, we need to recognize that being in harmony with each other can’t always happen simply because both parties have to be willing participants in the process.

The fathers’ hearts must be turned to the children, and they have to choose to turn their hearts. The fathers are responsible to turn their hearts toward the children. And the children must choose to turn their hearts in that same way. Both these things must be chosen and acted on before we can begin to have harmony. We can have harmony, a little bit here and a little bit there and that’s fine. That’s how it develops. That harmony exists in love.

The relationship that exists between members and ministers is vital to each of us in our spiritual development. Because the interactions do what? If we choose to interact, those interactions force us to overcome our own will and to allow the Holy Spirit to lead us to reconciliation wherever that is possible. Again, emphasis on that because there is caveat. Not every time can it be that way. It depends on the choices of each of us.

We can’t become like our Father and Elder Brother without the honing, the iron sharpening iron that each willing person can provide the other if we choose to accept it.

I’ve asked other ministers, “Have you ever been corrected by people you’re serving in your area?” “Yes, I have.” I’ve heard it many, many times. And it is so true. That’s how it is supposed to work. And vice versa.

There is an order to this thing of reconciliation, this thing of oneness. The first hearts that must be turned are those of the fathers. The heading of the verses in Ezekiel 34 is “Irresponsible Shepherds”. That deals with physical shepherds and physical sheep. Or we could say it’s about spiritual fathers and spiritual children. So, this subtitle might be, “Irresponsible Fathers” or “Irresponsible Ministers”. That’s the focus.

Ezekiel 34:1–5 And the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

2 “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?”

3 You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock.

4 The weak you have not strengthened, nor have you healed those who were sick, nor bound up the broken, nor brought back what was driven away, nor sought what was lost; but with force and cruelty you have ruled them.

5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food for all the beasts of the field when they were scattered.

Now, that’s a sobering thing to read and to look at it in the context that we are today. And again, what we’ve just read in Malachi, shepherds or fathers could be referring to civil government leaders, or religious leaders in general or it could be very specifically to the unenthusiastic spiritual fathers within God’s Church that Christ is ready to spew out. That’s not a pleasant thing to think about as a minister but it is something that we need to think about.

Speaking to ourselves in the ministry (all of us from every scattered group) we might ask, “how could I be called unenthusiastic?” In the spirit of Matthew 7, we might say, “well I’ve prepared sermons and I have prepared Bible Studies and I’ve counseled people wisely. What’s so unenthusiastic about that? That’s what ministers are supposed to do. Isn’t that true?”

We must remember that enthusiasm means God in you. That means that we do whatever we do just as God would do it. Not to promote self. That’s what Satan does. He promotes himself; he inspires it in others. Not to promote self but to build someone else up. To bring up a family, to raise strong, healthy children who can become the next generation of spiritual leaders.

We can teach sound doctrine; we can preach the gospel or any other good thing and leave God completely out of the picture simply because we’re filled with ourselves as ministers and not with God. Far too much of self is allowed in. Therefore, what do we have need of? Nothing! Everything’s okay. And all the while the sheep have need of much. What do they have need of? Sheep must be fed. What do we feed sheep in God’s Church? The Church is the pillar and ground of truth. We feed them truth borne in humility for their good. We try to make them healthy with the things they’re taught. They’re not taught compromise.

Christ doesn’t want us speaking or feeding for Him unless we’re imitating Him. That’s the whole point. Jesus Christ did not put up any walls or barriers between the seven churches which were folds of the flock in Asia Minor. There were no walls or

barriers. He spoke the truth to each of them according to our Father's will. He did all things according to our Father's will. He said He could do nothing of Himself but, in effect, He imitated His Father's judgment and His will.

Is it our Father's and therefore Christ's will that we put up walls and barriers between the various organizations or folds of His one flock? Is it Their will? Obviously not! Walls and barriers are put up by spiritual fathers with a little "f" that have wittingly or unwittingly become a capital "F" in their own mind. They think they know better. They have plotted their course. They're going to stick with it. There's no need to change.

Walls and barriers are put up to keep God's children from mingling together because we're too proud to humbly sit down and talk among ourselves to resolve differences of doctrine or opinion or whatever types of disputes come up. I'm not talking about sitting down to compromise. That's not the issue at all. God never compromises! He applies mercy and compassion, but it's always based on bedrock truth.

I'm talking about yielding to the truth. That's what enthusiasm looks like with God in us, yielding to the truth. He wrote about it. He said something here. In the March 6, 1981 issue of the "World Wide News," Mr. Armstrong was speaking about getting advice from his advisory council of elders because there were issues that had to be talked out. He said:

"I have always done that, as you older ministers know. And you know how far back we used to meet together. We weren't a legal board but it was the way we functioned as God's ministers and in God's Church. Often we went into session with divergent ideas. Always after an hour or so, sometimes less, sometimes more, we were all united because we only wanted God's truth. And we did not have someone who was trying to look out for his own personal, private political interest at that time. (I'm just throwing this in. Why did he talk about political interests at that time? Because that's something that is an aggravation within the body of Christ. There's just no getting around it. Let me continue.) That's why the church was growing 30 percent a year. And we always came to a unanimous idea. It must always be that way. Sometimes I didn't agree with the others when we went in and when we came out I did. I think that more often the others agreed with me before it was through, but there were times when I had to change my mind. We didn't want our own way."

Is that what we see in the Church of God today? Today is far different and so, the flock is scattered four hundred some odd directions, and some have given up, and some have struck out on their own. And the credibility of God's one Church is as fractured as it is scattered. That's a fact. Christ gives us a description of what credibility looks like, credibility that glorifies God:

Matthew 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.

15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

At this point I'm still speaking to the ministry. Fellow ministers, and I say this as one of you. I'm looking in the mirror. We can teach right doctrine and we can preach the gospel but if the flock is scattered and unfed where is the light? There's isn't any! Or it's very dim. And if we wanted to compare it with the spiritual condition, it's lukewarm. It's just not bright! It's not visible. And again, Christ said, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

That love is the light that Christ was referring to. It's what's noticed by everybody. Everybody can see it because it's so different. It's so unique. As ministers, are we reflecting that light in the way we care for the flock or are we in the darkness of pride scattering them? That's what we must address as ministers. Are we healing the wounds? In other words, speaking the truth in love. The truth is, there are no walls or barriers in God's one Church. Whoever is led by the Holy Spirit is a son or daughter of God. So, are we healing the wounds? Or are we teaching separation and superiority, thereby bringing the sheep down to a selfish level? We're making them sick! When sheep are taken care of in that manner, they become spiritually sick just like the shepherd. As ministers and spiritual fathers of Paul's sort, we must repent and turn our hearts to the children.

We don't want to think that everything is utter bleakness because changes are happening. Changes are happening within the Church of God. There are those who are yielding to the Holy Spirit, looking at the truth plain and simple and square. Various ones are congealing. Thoughts are congealing.

To all of us, Christ says, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent." Christ didn't leave any of us out. He said, "As many as I love" and how many do we suppose He loves? It includes each one of us. It's a process for each of us. And I'm talking about turning the heart. It's a process about God in us and taking on God's mind through a humble approach. It's a process for every minister out there. I know personally because I've been on the other side of this scenario, on the other side of the coin so I know exactly what it's like to make that kind of transition.

As members or beloved children, we too must likewise turn our hearts to the ministry. That's why Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ." All those who have the Holy Spirit are God's children but some He has appointed to teach, to exhort and to protect us right now.

Most can look back in their lifetime within the Church and we can see some ministers that were very helpful to us. I certainly can and I'm thankful for that. The point

is that if we can look back at one or some who were helpful, then we know what it's like to imitate someone as they follow Christ, as they point us to the Father and to Christ. I can certainly see in my time within the Church that I've had numerous pastors who did a lot of good. It's a good thing to have a good pastor.

In Titus 1, Paul is explaining to Titus why he left him in Crete. There was something very important for him to do.

Titus 1:5 For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you—

What was lacking and what was he so concerned about? Taking care of the sheep! The leadership was lacking so Paul gives Titus the qualifications of an elder.

9 holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict. (There's nothing in here about preeminence. It's about service.)

10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

11 whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole households, teaching things which they ought not, for the sake of dishonest gain.

12 One of them, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

13 This testimony is true, therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

The elder's task is very clearly laid out here. He was to teach, he was to guide. He was to protect the flock at every turn. That's the purpose for which God put them into the body of Christ. Their function in the Church, on a spiritual level, is what a physical father's function is intended to be in the family. We know from Ephesians 5 the husband was to give his life for his wife and therefore for his children as well. He was to empty himself following Christ's example to the Church. He was to be their reflection of God the Father and to direct them to Him. That is our Father's design at the physical family level and at the spiritual family level, the Church because that is our Father's intention, it's not hard to see why the serpent of old, why Satan did what he did in the Garden. He knew what God's intention was from the very beginning.

Through deception he displaced God's relevance in terms of how Adam and Eve looked to God. They didn't believe Him solely anymore at that point. They didn't look to Him solely for guidance and for His will. Satan also gutted the physical fathers' role by

weakening the man's intended authority within the physical family. And, of course, when we look at our culture today, look at how many families don't have fathers, and the havoc that's being wreaked on our country today and around the world.

Today, fathers are viewed by many as irrelevant. We, as God's children must not accept Satan's view that the ministry is irrelevant because they're not. We also must not see them with a capital 'F'. Never let them get too big in our eyes. That is as wrong as wrong can be. They've been given the God ordained task of directing God's children to Him as a matter of humble service.

We can also recognize and know that there have been many who've been helped and many who've been hurt, knowingly or unwittingly in their interaction with the ministry through the years. Again, Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ". Unless a minister repents and approaches it correctly there's a problem and we need to be aware of that.

He said that even though we've been given the Holy Spirit we still need guidance from and the love and respect for the ministry that follows Christ. And for many, that means a turning of the heart toward the ministry. The relationship between the fallible ministry and the fallible membership should come to reflect the very unity that exists between the Father and the Son. That's what's intended. And that's going to make overcomers of every, single one of us. Nobody left out.

We need God's help to be able to turn our hearts toward each other as pastors and members and again, ministers toward each other, members toward each other, whatever the case may be, given the state of the Church today. We need God's help.

We all (both minister and member) didn't begin this spiritual journey that we're on through our own reasoning. Not one of us in this room sat down and said, "You know what? I think I'll go to that church because it's over there and I'll just go there." No. We know that God our Father called each one of us and placed us in this one body where it pleases Him.

Upon repentance and baptism, He gave us His Holy Spirit. How do we know these things are true? If we've received the Holy Spirit, we know it's not by our own power of reasoning. We know these things are true because, at baptism, we turned from trusting in ourselves and coming to all the wrong conclusions that we did, and we turned to and embraced the faith of Jesus Christ which is God's gift to new believers. It's by faith that we know these things are true.

Simple truth that God puts in front of us, that the Church is the pillar and ground of the truth, those things are simple because of faith. We know that what God said is right. The spiritual journey that true believers are on is a walk of faith. It's not a walk of reason. Walls and barriers put up to separate God's people based on images or ego or to maintain a body of tithe-payers is a walk of carnal, human reasoning. That's as

simple as we can put it. Pretending to have no need of the ministry because they are as fallible as any one of us is the product of carnal human reasoning.

One the other hand, tearing down walls and barriers represents something. It represents letting go of confidence in self and putting it back in God's hands. That represents God in us. And repenting of our own stiff necks as we pray fervently for the ministry to get back on track also represents a letting go of confidence in self and faithfully putting it back in God's hands. It's something that happens because God is in us. God made us mutually dependent on each other, through Christ in us, so that through our spiritual struggles we could become one just as Christ and our Father are.

One thing we know for sure is that Christ will intervene sometime soon in world affairs for the sake of the elect. Therefore, we know there will be a turning of the hearts of the fathers to the children and of the children to the fathers. Will that include everyone that's out there? We don't know that. We know some will. There will be those who zealously repent and humbly follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. Not their own will. Not their own reasoning but the lead of the Holy Spirit, God in them.

Paul sums up what that will look like. Breaking into the thought process in Colossians:

Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, (In other words, Christ's own character image is the goal of our spiritual journey.)

11 where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

Within Christ's one body, He is the beginning and He is the end of all believers. Not our carnal reasonings. Not the barriers we put up and the imaginary things we do. This is the way it is.

12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering;

13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

These are the things that will make the bride of Christ the light of this world. That's the ministry's responsibility right now, to help prepare the bride of Christ, speaking of ourselves and speaking of each one of us as members. These are the qualities that will prove to the world that Christ came and that our Father is real and that His plan of salvation is absolute.

I'd like to conclude with a final question. Probably one that probably a fair number of people have considered. Do we all need to be in one organization in order to grow in the unity and the love that our Father and Christ have? Do we need to be in one organization for that to happen?

Very simply, Christ isn't the Head of an organization. He is the Head of a singular organism, His one Church. Therefore, those who are led by the Holy Spirit are already a part of that one organism. And those of that one Church who are following the lead of God's Holy Spirit will be zealously turning their hearts to one another in order to be a light in this world and in order to bring glory to our family name which is God's name.