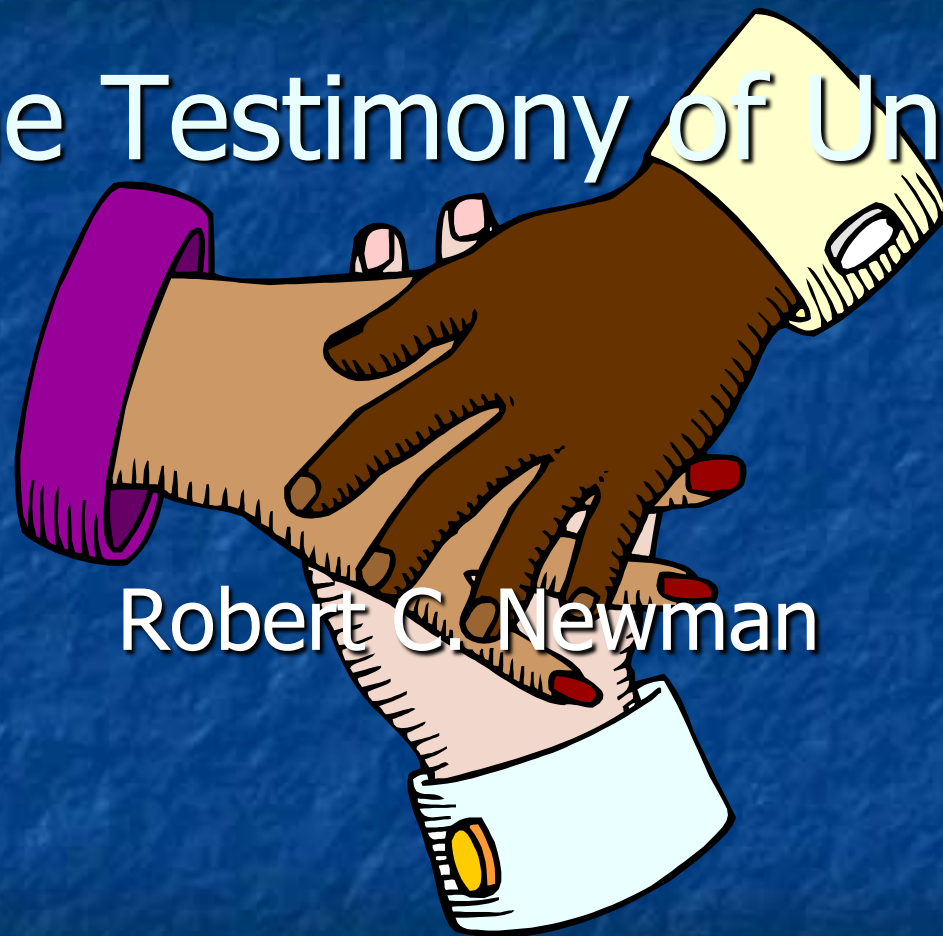


# The Testimony of Unity



Robert C. Newman

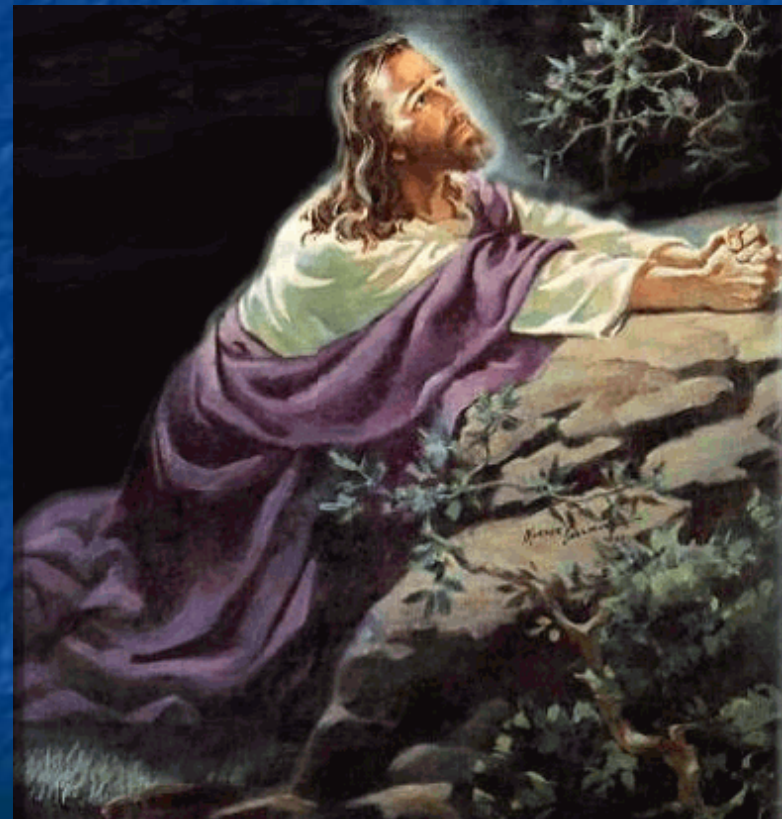


# Divisiveness

- ... is a common charge that unbelievers make against Christianity; there are so many varieties, all fighting each other.
- Unfortunately, there is some truth to this.
- This is a common complaint by Mormons and Roman Catholics against evangelicals also.
- How should we respond?

# Jesus' High Priestly Prayer

- In John 17, Jesus prays:
  - For himself (verses 1-5)
  - For his disciples (6-19)
  - For all believers (20-26)
- Let's look at the third part of this prayer.





John 17:20-26 (NIV) My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. 24 Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.

# Some Causes of Disunity

- Splitting
- Sinning
- Heresy
- Jealousy
- Empire-building
- Tradition

# Splitting

- Titus 3:10-11 (NIV) Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. 11 You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.
- Galatians 5:15 (NIV) If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.



# Sinning

- Jude 1:17-19 (NIV) But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. 18 They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." 19 These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.
- See also 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

2 Timothy 3:1-9 (NIV) But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. 6 They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, 7 always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. 9 But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.



# Heresy

- 1 John 4:1-3 (NIV) Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- See also Jesus' remarks in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:4 (NIV) Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many... 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold... 23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

# Jealousy

- Philippians 1:15-17 (NIV) It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so in love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains.
- 1 Timothy 6:3-5 (NIV) If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, 4 he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions 5 and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.



# Empire-building

- Acts 20:29-31 (NIV) I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.

# Tradition

Matthew 15:1-15 (NIV) Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, 2 "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" 3 Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' 5 But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' 6 he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition..." 12 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" 13 He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit."

# False Unity

- Yet in our desire to have biblical unity, we must be on guard against false unity.
- 2 Corinthians 6:14 (NIV) Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you."



# The Impact of True Unity

- See John 17:20-26, above.
- See also 1 Corinthians 11:19 (NIV) No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.
- God's approval rests on those who handle the problem of differences in a godly, loving & truth-seeking manner.

# The Impact of True Unity

- Unity is important enough for Jesus to pray for it in John 17: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father..." (20-21)
- As he points out, our unity should mimic the unity and love of Father and Son: "just as you are in me and I am in you." (21)
- Such unity displays God's glory: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one." (22)

# The Impact of True Unity

- It is recognizable by the world: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." (23)
- It testifies to the truth of Christianity: "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." (21)



# How are we doing?

- Jesus wants our unity as Christians to be a testimony for him.
- Is it?

