

## Be in One Accord

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There has always been a debate in this country about which car brand is the best. My wife's grandfather likes Ford, her dad likes Dodge, others like GM. But it's clear to me from Scripture that we should prefer Honda. Because if you noticed from our reading from Acts, the Apostles were all in one accord!

That's an old joke, of course. But that phrase is important. For the Apostles to be united, to be in one accord, was important for the early Church. It is equally important for us as believers to all be in one accord now. And the question is, what was it that united the Apostles? What is it that unites believers?

That's the really important question because we could be united in a lot of things. The Jewish leaders looked at the Apostles and saw them as a threat to their way of thinking. The Jewish leadership looked at the Apostles and saw them as being united against them. They had no idea that what the Apostles were preaching was for the benefit of the Jewish people. The world looks at believers and has a list of things that we are united against. They do not realize what we are united for and that what we believe and preach is for their benefit.

Again, what is it that unites believers? To answer that we need to look at the Gospel reading for today from John 20. We'll begin with verse 19, "So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" It is the evening of Easter day, and the disciples have already been told by Mary Magdalene that Jesus had risen from the dead. They are all in hiding, because they figured that the Jewish leaders would seek to punish anyone that was associated with Jesus. Lo and behold, Jesus comes and doesn't just appear to them, but actually stands in their midst, without having to open the doors to get in, and speaks with them as He had before He was crucified. This is not a vision or a ghost. This is really Jesus, risen from the dead.

Imagine what that must have been like. Think about if we were there and Jesus suddenly came and stood in our midst, and we could physically see Him. I would expect a few gasps and shouts of exclamation. And if anyone said, 'O my God' they'd be right! Because it's Jesus! I can see the disciples being a bit startled by this, a bit uneasy. So, Jesus calms them down by saying, 'peace be with you.'

And then in verse 20 we read, "And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord." Now they know for sure that it is Jesus, after seeing His hands and His side. And they rejoiced. Now He has shown Himself risen to them and not just to Mary and the other women. And they know for sure because they have seen Him. They are eyewitnesses, all of them, together.

They could be of one accord in Acts firstly because they all have the same experience with the Lord. They all walked with Him during His earthly ministry. They all experienced "losing Him" on the cross. And now they all have seen Him risen from the dead. Except for

Thomas at this point. But he sees the risen Lord eight days later when they are all together again.

We too have common experiences. We all have a testimony. Even those of us who have grown up in the Church and have believed for a long time have a testimony. We can all point to a part of our lives where we took a wrong turn.

For example, when I was in high school, I got in with the wrong crowd. They weren't horrendous people, but they certainly weren't helping me get closer to the Lord. Eventually, I saw the dead end, and the narrow road back to the correct path.

We all have stories like that that we can share. We all have faced hardship and tragedy and know the Lord's comfort through it. We can be united in these common experiences.

Verse 21, "So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." They are also all sent by Christ. Sent to preach the kingdom of God, to preach the gospel, to preach Christ. So, they are united in experience, and they are united in mission.

We have the same mission that the Apostles had back then. The mission hasn't changed. We too are to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ.

Verses 22 and 23, "And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup> If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained.'" Notice that they received the Holy Spirit from Christ. They had a personal relationship with Christ and received the Holy Spirit from Him. It was at Pentecost that they became full of the Holy Spirit and received power, as Jesus told them they would. Knowing that can make this a confusing verse. One commentary I read suggested that they receive the Holy Spirit here to fulfill the mission to preach the gospel of peace and forgiveness of sins. For three years they have heard Jesus tell people that their sins are forgiven. In giving them the Holy Spirit here, Jesus gives the disciples the authority to pronounce absolution.

Another commentary stated that what Jesus is doing is demonstrating what God did at creation when He breathed life into Adam, and Adam became a living being. Here Jesus is, in a sense, giving them new life in the Holy Spirit and a new purpose, to continue to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God. They are born again here at this moment.

However, both events together show us that the Holy Spirit is necessary in order to fulfill the mission. So, if the disciples are united in experience and in mission, they must also be united in the power of the Holy Spirit in order to fulfill that mission.

Same is true for us. We cannot fulfill the mission without the Holy Spirit. If we have put our trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, we have the Holy Spirit. But we need to allow the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. That means listening to Him, following His prompts, saying what He tells us to say, doing what He tells us to do.

As I said earlier, Thomas was not with the rest of the disciples the first time. And he gets the moniker, "doubting Thomas" for his statement in verse 25, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." But eight days later, Thomas is with the other disciples, and once again the doors were shut. Jesus came to them and again stated, "Peace be with you." And He

addresses Thomas with respect to his earlier statement about putting his finger into the place of the nails and hand into His side. And He tells Thomas, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." And at this point Thomas exclaims, "My Lord and my God!" Thomas states his faith in saying this. Jesus is Lord and Jesus is God.

Remember when Jesus asked the disciples about who people say that He is? He then asked them, "Who do you say that I am?" And it was Simon Peter who stated, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ. He came to die on the cross to save us and rose again from the dead and is now seated at the right hand of God. He is the Son of God. He is God. And He is the Lord.

It is necessary for us to obey Christ as our Lord if we are to be citizens of His kingdom. Our actions are the evidence of our faith. If we truly believe that Christ is the Lord than our actions will follow that belief and we will obey Christ. Remember Romans 10:9-10, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup>for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."

A lot of people believe in God, but do not follow Jesus Christ as their Lord. Even the demons believe in God, but they do not obey Him as their Lord. We are to not only believe that Jesus is God, but we are trust and obey Him as our Lord. That requires us to do two things: submit our lives fully to Him and to obey Him. Both show that we truly believe that He is the Son of God, that He is the Christ, that He is the Lord. That confession of faith unites the Church.

Remember the Church in Corinth? The Church in Corinth had people saying, "I follow Paul. I follow Apollos." And Paul rebuked them with the truth that Christ is the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:10-17), and that Paul and Apollos are merely Christ's servants (1 Corinthians 3:5). The Church is to be united just as the Apostles were united. And what unites the Church under the head, Jesus Christ, is the belief that there is only one Lord, and that is Jesus Christ. We do not all get to just do whatever seems right in our own eyes, as seems to be the case in the world today. No! We obey Christ as Lord only.

And we follow Christ as our Lord completely. Our lives can become so fragmented when we do not submit fully to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. And we are all guilty of it from time to time. We tend to ignore certain things, or we hold back portions of our heart and life. We try to run these parts of our lives ourselves. What happens when we do that? Things go poorly. We get into trouble and fall into sin. If we would repent and submit to Christ fully, we will find more joy, more growth, more fruit, and would be more united with our fellow believers.

How were the Apostles able to do what they did? They submitted to the Lordship of Christ and followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit. They believed the message of the gospel so strongly that they let nothing stand in the way of their preaching. They maintained fellowship with one another. They encouraged one another.

And they all saw Jesus with their physical eyes. Our belief is by faith not by sight. And Jesus told Thomas that, "Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."

The same unity should be present in us who walk by faith and not by sight. Different members of the same body with Christ as the head. United first in our submission to Christ as

our Lord. United in the message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died on the cross for our sins and rose again from the dead on Easter Sunday and is now seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven. United in fellowship with one another through Church services, Bible studies, prayer meetings, and other activities. United in the mission to spread the Kingdom of God, to be disciples of Christ making disciples of Christ. And united through the working of the Holy Spirit in and through us. That is what we are to be as the Church.

May we be so united, no matter what kind of car we drive!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!