

Unity (Part 8): Ephesians 4 (E)

Patience and Forbearance

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I feel a brief review is in order to refresh our memories and at the same time to provide a platform for leading into what we are going to go into today.

It is good to remember that Paul did not use a normal word to express humility, but rather a fifteen letter word that, while literally meaning lowly (even to the point of groveling), he used the word that I found in my research that did not have a "good usage", as we would call it, in the Greek language. But the apostle took that word and used it in a good way. That word also strongly implies restraint, meaning restraint in ones dealings with other people.

When we examine the other three words that appear in Ephesians 4:2 (meekness, patience and forbearing), we find that some form of restraint is common to all of them. Humility or lowliness is the most important of these qualities and plays a strong role in producing the others.

Humility has its basis in an honest and realistic comparison of us with God. To compare ourselves with other people always allows us a great deal of wiggle room because we can always find flaws in other people's character. But these rationalizations are not really honest because our goal is not to be in the image of other people or them to be in our image. Our goal is to be in the image of God, therefore the comparison must be with Him.

When we do that and we do it honestly, we always come out on the short end of the stick. We are woefully poor (poor of spirit) of any value in terms of any quality or characteristic one might even begin to imagine. We fall so far short of His holiness that He knocks the props right out from under any roof that we might have for taking pride in what we are.

If we are striving to be like Him, if we're striving to walk in His steps, if we're striving to be in His image, this comparison gives us a much more

realistic foundation to work from in relating both to Him and to fellow man. This is a wonderful attitude adjuster and regulator of relationships.

As I mentioned, humility tends to be the flip-side of faith, because where the confident will push themselves forward, the humble have a tendency to hesitate. It is a matter of restraint.

In the humble, there is a consciousness of emptiness, potential weakness, of helplessness, of worthlessness. But—and this is a big BUT—don't ever get the idea that the humble are weak. Paradoxically, they are among the strongest of all people on earth. It all depends on one's perspective. In God's perspective these people are strong and from people's perspective it depends on who it is that they want to impress.

Now it's interesting that here in II Corinthians 12:6 Paul says:

II Corinthians 12:6-10 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool [i.e., to take pride in what he had experienced]; for I will say the truth, but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he sees me to be, or that he hears of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you; for **my strength is made perfect in weakness.**" Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak [lowly], then am I strong.

Humility is so important that God gave Paul some help to make sure that he would stay humble. And yet, I think that if we would all evaluate that from the time to Jesus on, there was nobody more spiritually powerful than Paul. It all depends on your perspective. Who is the one being compared with? I'm sure in comparison with other men, Paul didn't look like he was very strong. But when God looked at him, He liked what He saw, and he was a powerful, effective servant of God.

It is so important because humility's dominant thrust is its willingness to submit to God AND what is right and true. Some, of course, would submit willingly to death if it was going to glorify God in their doing. Therefore, it pretty much sets the tone of our relationship with Him and with others. In both cases, i.e. with God and man, the humble esteem the other better than themselves. This quality will guard the unity of the spirit.

Humility or lowliness goes hand and glove with meekness. As I described meekness, it is a rather complex subject requiring many items to accurately describe it. But again, there is an element of restraint that is evident. The meek are kind, they are gentle, they are sensitive to others needs. They are thoughtful. They are agreeable people. They are not aggressive, assertive, insistent or argumentative. They are easily approached and easy to get along with. But again, don't be mistaken. The meek are not weak. I hardly think that we would classify Jesus and Moses as being weak. But meek they were. They were firm and they were uncompromising in regard to following truth, but they did not feel constrained to overwhelm those who were aligned against them.

Turn with me to Titus 3:1-2, and notice the contrast that is given here:

Titus 3:1-2 Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers [the subject here is being subject to, submitting to, living under as peacefully as one can], to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men.

So the context and the contrast show very clearly what meekness is. It is being contrasted to brawling, being argumentative and fighting, being competitive.

Here's what the Phillip's translation translates those two verses as:

Titus 3:1-2 (Phillip's) "Remind your people to recognize the power of those who rule and bear authority. They must obey the laws of the state and be prepared to render what good service they can. They are not to speak evil of any man, they must not be

argumentative, but gentle, showing themselves agreeable to everybody."

Galatians 6:1 Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, restore such an one *in the spirit of meekness* , considering yourself, lest you also be tempted.

Again from the Phillip's translation:

Galatians 6:1 (Phillip's) "Even if a man should be detected in some sin by brothers, the spiritual one among you should quietly set him back on the right path, not with any feeling of superiority, but being yourself on guard against temptation."

So the meek take a good hard look at themselves first and then they treat others with the same gentleness that they want to be treated with. If they are directly involved in a dispute, rather than making every effort to vindicate themselves, they have a ready willingness to suffer wrong. The reason is, because to them, peace and unity are more important than appearing to win. They act in such a way as to allow God to be the one that vindicates them. They don't have to be self-vindicated.

With these two in place, we can then go on to a further manifestation of God's spirit in us by being patient or longsuffering. "Passivity" does not do this word justice. If you can get the picture that I am going to describe, and I know you should be able to because you've all seen it at sometime in your life, . . . Atlas. Remember Atlas of mythology? He was holding the earth on his shoulder, and if you can just get a picture of that, you have a pretty close approximation of what this word "patient" means.

Holding the world on your shoulders is hardly passive. It requires the expending of a great deal of energy, straining against the downward push of that great weight. Patience is not just lying around there, doing nothing. It is when this word is applied to relationships that it's meaning becomes very real.

Again, there is a strong sense of self-restraint, self-control. Patience means that we hold control of ourselves for a long time without giving way to our passions. It is used in Greek literature of a person who has the power to avenge himself, yet he refrains from doing so. This word is occasionally linked with mercy in that God, who surely has the power and more than justifiable reasons to avenge Himself on us, patiently restrains Himself. In some contexts it even has the sense of being lenient in our dealings with others.

We may be involved with a person who is really irritating. I mean, they rub the cat's hair in the wrong direction, and that cat's hair is on us. And our desire is to demolish them or at least humiliate them. But those who are longsuffering don't give into this because they remember that they want to be like God and God could easily have demolished them a long time ago and with good, justifiable reasons. It's a wonder He doesn't blow up at us. He restrains Himself.

Just in case you might underestimate the importance of patience, go back to the book of James in the first chapter:

James 1:2-3 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into different temptations, knowing this, that the trying [or the tempting] of your faith works patience.

The trying of our faith. This seems to be going on an awful lot. Our faith is being tested. But it works patience or it puts to work patience. This verse is telling us this: the trials, of and by themselves, do not produce spiritual maturity. In fact, it may turn people bitter. It may cause them to be envious, jealous of others who don't seem to be having any trials, who seem to be sailing right through life with no problems, but here "*I have the world on my shoulders, all kinds of sorrow. I have sickness. My children are giving me problems. My husband is giving me problems. And my faith is being tested because it looks like I might lose my job because of the Sabbath.*" We could go on and on and on with things like that and it would be very easy to become bitter.

Did the trial that Jonah went through produce a great deal of patience in him? At least at the first, he was angry with God. This is a good example that trials of and by themselves do not necessarily produce good things. By good things I mean spiritual maturity. It is faith, plus the test, plus patience that complete the process of coming to holiness, because that's what the trial is for. The trial of our faith is to bring us to holiness, but if we don't have patience, things are going to get short circuited. That's how important it is. It is faith, plus the test, plus patience which enables the right things to be produced.

The natural reaction to trials is to want to escape them and that's understandable. But God says no, don't do that. Patiently bear with Me. Let Me accomplish what I want to accomplish through this trial. Our job is to let our faith produce patience. While we are bearing with it, what are the patient expending their energy on? Well, the answer is that they are working on straining against the self, because that is where the real burden lies.

Because of the lowliness and the meekness which precedes, they do not feel incumbent upon themselves to change others, but rather emphasize their responsibility to change themselves. They patiently work through it, working on themselves, **their** attitude, **their** relationship with God, **their** relationship with other people, the things that are producing the problem. They cannot change the other person, but they can change themselves. If they change themselves, then patience has its perfect work or its complete work.

Revelation 1:9 I John, who also am your brother and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

This is a verse that emphasizes the overall importance of patience. We just saw in James 1—that it is patience which allows the trial to become completed, (i.e., producing the right thing).

There is a slight translation change that is certainly within the correct grammar here (I'm not going to go through all of that), but what John is emphasizing here (you know the Greeks wrote emphatically in order to draw

attention to certain words), is the key word "kingdom." The other two words, tribulation and patience, are like parentheses, brackets, on both sides of the word kingdom.

Here's what comes out of this. The word *tribulation* defines the path to the kingdom! Think of tribulation in terms of trials. Think of tribulation in terms of pressures that come up as a result of our faith in Jesus Christ, our faith in God's kingdom that it is coming to the earth and that we're going to be a part of it. The way to the kingdom of God is through trials. We're not just going to skate along. And the reason we're not just going to skate along is because God has created work to do in our lives in order that we might be prepared for the kingdom. If we aren't prepared we're not going to be there.

The way of preparation is for God to put us through trials, just as if we were going to school. Think of trials in terms of lessons that need to be learned, character that needs to be built, attitudes that need to be adjusted. All those things will put pressure on us. So tribulation, or pressure, or trials are the path. "All who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," is another way of saying it. We are going against the flow of the world and God has designed it this way in order that we're going to be prepared for the kingdom of God. So there's always going to be pressure on us.

Pressure is the way to the kingdom and **PATIENCE** is the necessary element for making it. If we are impatience, **WE WON'T BE THERE!** Salvation is by grace through faith and faith is needed when we do not have what we want, what we desire—the kingdom of God. There is no need for faith **IF WE DON'T HAVE TO WAIT!** Do you get it? And patience is required while you're waiting. It's that simple.

So the way to the kingdom is through testing and trial. And the way to succeed in testing and trial is to put your faith to work by being patient! That's the path that will exercise the faith. God will see that it is there and His creative efforts on our behalf will work. So all of us have to have it. It's there, brethren, but it does have to be activated. We have to know that God really wants it, He really means it and if we want to be prepared for His kingdom, we better start using it.

Forbearing is closely related to the others. In fact, it is especially closely related to patience. All of these terms are linked as in a chain, one to the other. Forbearance literally means to hold up against, like you're holding up against a wall. You hold up against something. It can mean to hold upright. It can mean to hold in. It literally means to **restrain!** It can mean to stop. It all depends on the context.

If a person tempts you into a wrong action you hold yourself up against him so that you do not do it. You resist. You put up with it, is another way of saying it. You bear with it or you endure it or you suffer it. Forbearance is involved in all of these terms. You don't cave into or buckle under the pressure of another person's irritation, but rather those who forbear make allowances for the other person's behavior.

Difficult? You better believe it. It has to be that way because we're called to such a high calling. It's of necessity difficult. We haven't been called to something that is easy to perform. It requires a great deal of the setting of the will by faith.

Those who forbear will come up with, what is to them anyway, very understandable reasons why the other person is that way toward them. They will make excuses to themselves for the other person's behavior in order to give themselves reasons to forbear.

We are told in the Bible to learn to forbear because God forbears us. If we're going to be in His image, it has to be part of our character.

Romans 2:4 Or despise you the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering [there they are linked together]; not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

God bore with us. Another way of saying it was He was tolerant with us. Another way of saying it was He was indulgent toward us—for the time being. There comes an end to His forbearance.

Romans 3:25 is explaining justification—that we are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

Romans 3:25 Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation [that is a means of passing over our sins] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.

I saw a translation (but I don't know where I saw it), on this verse where that last phrase, "sins that are past, through the forbearance of God," was translated, "For the remission of sins during the time that He withheld His hand."

Can you picture a father whose children are misbehaving and he wails back with his hand and he's just about ready to cuff them, either on the back of the hand or the seat of the pants or wherever it is, anywhere he can get a hold of them, and he withholds it. That's what God means. He was ready to strike out during that time that He withheld His hand. It's like He stopped Himself. He had every reason to strike out, but He didn't, mercifully. It's a vivid picture. Anybody whose a parent can relate to that.

Look at another place in Acts 17, where Paul was speaking to the people in Athens and he said:

Acts 17:29-30 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the [divine nature] is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at [He forbear it, He withheld His hand]; but now commands all men everywhere to repent.

God overlooked. He tolerated. He bore with it because, in this case, of our ignorance. God made excuses, as it were, to Himself, in order to keep Himself from striking out.

You realize that I am, of course, bringing God down to a man's level so that we can understand. That's the kind of language Paul used and that's the kind of language Luke used so that we can understand that God bore with us. We have to learn to do the same.

Now further, I won't go in to this too deeply (this is in Ephesians 4 again), Paul says we have to do all of this—walk worthy with lowliness of mind and meekness, in patience and forbearing—he says we have to do all of this in love.

You know, if we really love somebody, it's not nearly so hard to put up with them, is it? It's not nearly so hard to bear with them, to be patient with them, to be kind to them, to have a mind in which they are either on the same level with us or even above us. That's why Paul mentions that, because if we really do love somebody, these characteristics are much easier to use. They come to mind much more easily and we're willing to use them.

Isn't it this way with our children? We love them, but sometimes they can really be irritating. They get under our collar. They have so much energy. They're jumping up and down, their minds are so active, they're all over the place, their hands are all over the place and they're clumsy, they trip over things. They leave things laying out, and on and on and on. They don't take care of their rooms. They don't make their bed. They don't do the dishes right. What do we do? We bear with them. We're patient with them. We're kind despite all this irritation and aggravation they give us because we love them.

All of these four elements here especially, they are all elements of love. If you would look (we won't turn to it), but if you go to I Corinthians 13:3-7, you will find everyone of these qualities mentioned describing what love is. Every one of them is listed there.

I wonder if you noticed, that the characteristics that Paul mentioned are mentioned either in the beatitudes or in the fruit of the spirit. So what he is doing here is that he is urging us to use God's spirit, all with guidance, by yielding to do what it teaches us to do.

These five elements—walking worthy, lowliness of mind, meekness, patience and forbearance—are all resident within us because of God's spirit. **IT'S ALREADY THERE**, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by His spirit. It is waiting, those qualities are there, waiting for us to choose to use them. We CANNOT say that we don't have them! YES WE

DO! But we are not practiced in choosing to use them, because we keep falling back on the old carnal ways. If you don't choose them, the unity of the spirit will not be guarded and it will have that tendency to divide. So we must be mindful of them, consciously choose them in order to give evidence to God that we are getting it and that we are being formed into His image.

Again brethren, this unity is not something that can be forced through a merger of organizations. It cannot be imposed. It guards what we have entirely because of God's spirit. It flows from our reconciliation with God and the receiving of His spirit. It is something that we must guard (this unity) by yielding to God, practically applying the doctrines contained within the gospel and given through His apostle.

Today we're going to move into the next verse in the book of Ephesians chapter 4 (the next series of verses actually), and we're going to research into other absolutely, essential elements of the unity some have lost in order that each of us will individually take steps to regain the quality of the relationship with God that will enable us to be unified, then, as men.

Whereas walking worthy, humility, meekness, patience and forbearing involve direct, practical application for guarding the unity of the spirit, these elements that we are going to go into now are primarily teaching us; they give more specific shape to the huge visionary concepts that were contained in chapters 1 through 3. They are nonetheless things that must be understood and firmly and fervently believed in and held in our hearts so there is more specific guidance. They are guidelines to our thinking that tend to hold our practice on a straight and narrow path to unity in God's hands.

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

This is surely among the better remembered passages in all of the Bible, if only because it seems to stick in our minds because it rolls off the tongue so easily, and probably also because of the series of seven "ones".

What does each of these elements mean in the context of unity? These seven elements give us the reason why we should diligently and urgently keep the unity of the spirit. If you read back in the beginning of the chapter you will see that what I just told you is true.

In the epistles where Paul and other writers deal with church problems and difficulties in the lives of the members (with Paul especially), they almost invariably dealt with them in terms of these seven mentioned reasons. The foremost reason that he gives in most situations, as to why we can either do or not do something, is because we are members of the church. He may not use the term church, he may use the term body of Christ.

What I have told you again is true. There is one church and it is our duty to guard our place in it. We are in it and we don't want to lose our place in it! So he keeps bringing up the church in one way or another and he is basically saying you want to do this BECAUSE you are in the church.

If we do not understand the doctrines of the church, then the appeals and exhortations and indictments made by Paul and the other writers will be meaningless. Very much of our trouble regarding the church arises because our thinking usually begins with ourselves. This is one of the major fruits of sin. We are too subjective in our thinking because human nature puts us at the center of the universe. Please get this because it leads to why the church is so important and why Paul continually uses the church as the reason why you should do or not do things.

We are too subjective in our thinking because human nature puts us at the center of our universe. It can take us all the way to the thought that we alone are important. It's narcissism. It's an extreme that exists and I believe that I have seen it in the church. If you look in the mirror and you see yourself and you are the focus of everything that you do... We can't be that way. That is a producer of a great deal of mental illness. This subjective thinking makes us feel as though we and what we think and what we want and what we are and what we want to do and what is happening to us is the only thing that really matters.

Human nature promotes individualism. You'll begin to see the drift of this in just a minute. Human nature promotes subjectivity and human nature therefore promotes individualism. The church is a body. It is a fully integrated body with many other people in it and we have a responsibility to that body. We have a responsibility to each other as well as to God, because the head of this body is Christ. If we are so subjective in our thinking, we are going in the opposite direction of that body and we will not fulfill our place in the church, in the body. Being in the body requires objective thinking, i.e., thinking that goes out away from us and toward the other.

I just quoted the verse where Paul said, "Those with lowliness of mind will think of others better than themselves." (Philippians 2:3) That's objective thinking. Subjective thinking will say, "I am the big cheese here and what I am doing and what I think is the most important thing." But being in the body, being in the church requires thinking that is going in the other direction. And so, the truth of the Bible, and especially the New Testament, takes us out of this and gives us a vision of being involved in something so grandiose and so important that we are expected to make **it** the center and focus of our concern.

God has purposed that right now the church is the center of the action leading toward the goal. This is why Paul gives us being in the church as the primary reason we are to do or not to do whatever it is we are to do or not to do. It's because we are in the church. We are the apple of God's eye. The church is the center of His creative efforts right now which He has focused on the kingdom of God.

What are you supposed to seek first? Are we not to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you? And what is the vehicle, the means by which He is going to get us into the kingdom? It's the church! We are in it. We are part of that body. So the church has to figure in all of our actions, eventually all of our thoughts. Subjectivity, our focus on our self, has to give way to objectivity. Objectivity deals with things out from the self. Our objectivity is to be toward the kingdom of God, or one might say the gospel, or God Himself, or our hope (the resurrection of the dead), or our calling or the church.

You can insert any one of them and they will be correct. God expects us to redirect our thinking in order to go with the flow of His program with these elements rather than with the world. This will gradually cause much of our subjectivity to fade away and it will cause the image of God to arise in its place in dominating our thinking.

Now answer this question to yourself: Is there anything grander than knowing that one is part of the body of Jesus Christ and his life is headed toward the kingdom of God, to be God, very God, to be a spiritual member of that family, which is also a government which God is going to give rulership over the inheritance?

This is why Paul mentions the church first, because he deals, if you'll look at the order that he put them in, with the one that is of **the most personal concern** to you and me in those seven elements. It's the church, because God created it in order that there might be a practical way that we make it into His kingdom in the very best condition we possibly can be in. These seven doctrinal elements are absolutely essential to unity in the church because they set the order of priorities.

What is your concept of the church?

Colossians 1:12-13 Giving thanks to the Father, which has made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance [the earth is our inheritance] of the saints in light [truth]; who has delivered us from the power of darkness [Satan, evil], and has translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.

Everyone of us knows that we are in the church, correct? Yes! Are you aware that you are already in the kingdom of God? You are! It's not here in fullness. It's not here in a physical reality, as we might say. But we are already in the kingdom. That verse says that we are in the kingdom of His dear Son.

This is a spiritual reality that we must consider in relation to the church in order to grasp the importance of the church. The church is a portion of the kingdom of God. It's not its fullness, but it is there.

Philippians 3:20 For our conversation . . .

Conduct you might say, but as the margin says 'our citizenship.' It's the Greek word *politeuma*, the word from which we get our English word politics. And citizen is a correct translation of that.

Philippians 3:20 For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Does that add another proof that we are already in the kingdom of God if our citizenship is in heaven? The Bible looks upon the church as an outpost of the kingdom of God that is in heaven. We are already have citizenship in it.

God gives us all of these analogies in order to help us to understand what we are, where we are, what the church is. So that it becomes important to us and we will exercise our will to do the right thing and exercise our faith.

Matthew 13 in verse 38, explaining the parable of the good seed and the tares:

Matthew 13:38 The field is the world, the good seed are the children of the kingdom.

That's so plain, isn't it? Why do you think He would use the word *children* or *son*? Because now He is drawing in another angle here that adds to what we already know. He is drawing in the family aspect so that we understand that when we talk about the church, we are also talking about the family of God, because we are sons and daughters of God, are we not? We are His children. He is our Father. Jesus Christ is our elder brother. We are in the church, but that is the body of Jesus Christ of which He is the head. He does the thinking. He does the guiding, the directing, the instructing and we follow His orders.

We have a citizenship that is in a nation. We can also look this up in I Peter where we are called a holy nation. I could go on with the analogies. There are even more. I may do it, maybe not in this sermon, but it might be in the next sermon, I'll show you even more.

Herbert Armstrong used to refer to us being in the kingdom in embryo. So we are in the kingdom. We are in the body of Christ. We are in the church. They are all somewhat synonymous terms, but each term gives us a slightly different perspective depending upon the context. Thus, the Bible speaks of the kingdom in two ways—of it being here and of its coming in the future. They are both correct. It is here in embryonic form now and it will come in its fullness when Christ returns.

I am hoping that you will allow this to impress you because this is why the Bible demands such intense loyalty from us. This is why Paul explained, or encouraged us, or exhorted us to do what we have to do or not do what we should not do because of the church, because of the kingdom. It is in that sense that they are synonymous.

I and II Corinthians presents pretty strong evidence that the people in Corinth did not understand. That's why he had to write so much in that epistle about the church. They did not perceive themselves as being integrated into a spiritual body that is also an embryonic forerunner of the kingdom of God. As a result, they didn't see any reason to be loyal to it. They were already split into cliques or were in the process of breaking themselves away from it and beginning to form their own groups.

Do you understand why Paul said in I Corinthians 1:13, "Is Christ divided?" Impossible! Can men divide the kingdom of God against itself? No, they cannot. This is why this unity is already there. Even though we are scattered all over the place individually, there is still a unity there. We're going to add another piece to that before we get done with this. So the Corinthians, apparently, didn't see any need for them to be loyal to it. So they split.

Ideally, the church should be a reflection of the oneness of the God family. And even as there is only one kingdom of God, there is also only one church. Consider this: there are many church organizations claiming to be Christian, quite a number of them out in the world, believing vastly different doctrines. There are many church organizations, we might call them corporations, within the greater church of God. How can they all be one church, one true church, believing and practicing somewhat different things and yet claiming to be in touch with the same source of instruction?

Well if you will read Revelation 2 and 3 (which we are not going to do now)... I think that you are familiar enough to know that those seven local congregations were, in many respects, vastly different from one another. But the reality is, there is still only one church. This verse tells us (John 10:35), that the scripture cannot be broken. Because of these factors, all have to be referring to, what scholars call, the mystical body of Jesus Christ. This means that the one true church is not a physical corporation, institution, or congregation, but a living, spiritual organism, and it is, therefore, for all intents and purposes, invisible.

With regard to practical application, it means that the group that one is fellowshiping with, though not unimportant, is less important than that one understands that there is only one true church found by a spiritual, not a physical, unity. The members of that body are scattered all over the place in many organizations.

The physical unity may also be in place to some extent and maybe for some limited time. But this also all must be understood in context with what Paul is teaching here. The failure to grasp this has led to countless tragedies in the world, like the Crusades. All these terrible things that took place during the middle ages, because one group, one politically, powerful, religious group saw themselves as the only true church and impressed that upon others. Perhaps millions of people professing to be Christians were killed. I'm talking about the Inquisition, besides the Crusades.

I bring this up that even though those things were perpetrated by organizations out in the world calling themselves the true church, it has also led to things within the greater Church of God, like one organization self-righteously proclaiming all the others Laodicean, because they see only their group as being the true church. That is not a truth they can pull out of Revelation 2 and 3.

Matthew 13:24-30 Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, did

you not sow good seed in your field? From whence then has it tares? He said unto them, An enemy has done this. The servants said unto him, will you then that we go and gather them up? Be he said, No, lest while you gather up the tares, you root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather you together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.

Here we have another picture of the church showing why the true church is scattered in many organizations. The kingdom of heaven resembles a situation on a man's farm. The farmer sows good seed, but while the plants are developing the weeds sprout up. The true and the false are mingled together in the same field. I think it's interesting that the bad seed is sown while everybody is asleep. I want you to think about that in relation to Matthew 25 and beginning in verse 1, about the ten virgins. Brethren, it was Laodiceanism that put us asleep! The bad seed was really sown amongst us then.

What we don't know is exactly when we went to sleep. We can't pin it down to a year, but I do know that Herbert Armstrong said that he began to see Laodiceanism in the church about 1969. So if he was correct in that, I think we could say (just by taking these two things together here Matthew 13 and Matthew 25) that it was way back then that the church began to go to sleep and began to go downhill.

I want you also to note that God clearly shows in this parable that this was a **deliberate** act. It didn't just happen. AN ENEMY did this! In order to get a right understanding of this then, we have to recognize that **God permitted it and it is going to continue**, this picture of true and false! Both are going to remain until God gathers us together at the resurrection.

Okay now, this parable is fulfilled in the visible church. Again, if we compare this to Revelation 2 and 3, I think that we would have to conclude that in some of those groups, the tares are dominant. It doesn't mean that there aren't true Christians in there. If you look at that Thyatira group . . . I'll tell you, they are a tough set, but the tares are running it. The same is true

with the Pergamos group where Satan's seat is. How about Sardis? They have a name that they're alive, but they're dead! And he says there is only a few among them who are still awake, who have not left the faith.

I think that we would have to conclude from that that there are some groups that the tares are running the show, but there are still true Christians in those groups, even though the tares dominate. I would also have to conclude that all of the churches of God, that have spun off the Worldwide Church of God, have tares in them. I also think that I need to add to this something that I think is entirely logical, i.e., that every one of the groups have a variety of true Christians in various stages of development. There is a mixture in all of them.

Well it just happens that this is probably a pretty good place to stop, because the next section, if I go into it, is going to take us a good way over time.