

## 02 Being Cooperative in Church Unity (side 2)

We have a responsibility, my wife and I, since both her parents and mine are deceased, all having been born in the last century, and in reality it's hard to realize both hers and mine would all be a hundred years or older.

That was another generation that is gone.

We have a responsibility in that sense as the elders in our family toward our children and our grandchildren, and we have a responsibility to set an example and to give advice as is appropriate without being meddlesome.

So also does any parent to the child or the husband who's the head of the wife in a family, and in a local congregation we have responsible people, deacons, deaconesses, elders, and ministers of various responsibilities in the church.

We are to grow, to come, to understand whether doctrine or other things, but we cannot do that if we're not here.

If Christ is governing and guiding the church, which He is, therefore to be here is very important.

If there is a question that is something surprisingly new, what we need to do is remember what elders and not elders in this case, but maybe older people in that sense, but people said of a minister who left.

Why did he leave us when we needed him most? It doesn't matter who such people may be by name, but it was interesting to realize that when people assume that Christ cannot rule the church, then we discover that they leave the flock.

Instead of being there to support the brethren through the emotional trauma that some have through study, through whatever it may be the situation, our purpose is to remember that God has sent Christ to call through the ministry and through your own personal relationships other people to come to see what we do.

Some of us come from a secular, not a religious background.

Some may come from a non-Christian background.

Some are Jews.

We have some Africans in Nigeria who come from a Muslim background.

We have some people, in this case a lovely young lady who's since married, Phong, who came from a Chinese non-Christian background in Thailand.

She came to be acquainted with a young man who was a graduate of Ambassador College and different from other Thais, Phong is a Chinese name, she's Thai Chinese background, and she asked a young man what he stood for, what made him different from others.

He explained, and so she wanted to meet the people that essentially made him different.

I'll leave it at that because she didn't get the big picture yet, and she met a number of people at the Festival of Tabernacles in 1988 when I was there, I think I have all my dates correct.

Yes, and she became interested in what the church was teaching and began to read the Bible for the first time and discovered in there what the Bible is all about.

She has since become a member, they have established a school in Northern Thailand for the teaching of English and are prospering quite well in a country where the teaching of English is very important.

I think that perhaps that's a lesson that we can't learn in our society today as easily as the Thais can learn it.

We have a large population of underprivileged people who have not absorbed the English language that is necessary if they're going to live here and work and prosper, but that's beside the point now, it's a separate subject that should not be overlooked, however.

We are here as a group of people to examine the information that the church presents.

Now from time to time there will be new things come to light.

There was a time Mr. Armstrong didn't understand church government, then a time when he did begin to understand it and the church did.

There was a time that certain things in the Bible were unknown or unclear and a time to correct some things.

God has never said that he would give us all truth at once.

The spirit of God leads God's people into all truth.

The problem of course is that some of us are old and die before we find it all, but that is not the issue.

The issue is the state of mind of your attitude or to use the figurative expression, your heart, the state of mind of your attitude.

So the important thing beside meeting here today and regularly so and holding to the unity of the church that is governed by Christ, note that because there are people who make an issue of that question when in fact their church is not governed by Christ, the next important thing is your attitude.

You must have not merely open mindedness.

Now there are some people who have mistakenly said the church taught that we should keep our minds closed to things that the church didn't teach.

I suppose that they think that is the case because they did, not because they were told to.

The church says or should say if it doesn't, you are to guard the door of your mind in terms of what you allow in.

You are not to shut the doors of your mind to allow nothing in.

You are to guard the doors of your mind to know whether the message is the message of the serpent representing the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or the messenger of the tree of life.

You do have a text as it happens today that Abraham didn't, we call it the Bible.

I have here the Old Testament as only the Jews have it without the New Testament.

We have a situation where we must recognize that there are all kinds of voices and I don't mean that you hear in here.

I mean all kinds of voices that speak in print and magazines and newspapers and other publications on television, radio, through the movies, whatever.

Many messages, many messengers, all sorts of ideas.

It is therefore important that you guard what it is that you decide to allow in and you must recognize that that responsibility is that you do so in connection with what the scripture is telling you.

That is, to examine what you hear by what the scripture is clearly making plain and to recognize the fact that you should pay special attention if the church of God, which you have come to recognize as God's church, is speaking when there are things you may not have understood before or the church concludes should be reexamined and or corrected.

Now when it comes from certain sources, you may want to be very much on guard.

When it comes to other sources, you may not need to be.

You will have to learn how to guard the doors of your mind, but you don't do it by throwing everything open and letting any and every voice come in, and you don't guard the door of your mind if you decide to close the door and lock it, then you're not any longer on guard duty.

You see, to guard the door of your mind means you are examining information, and you are listening, and you pay attention in accordance with your perceptions of the responsibility of those who are speaking.

When somebody in the ministry proposes to explain things unrelated to the ministry, you may not find the evidence as satisfactory as when that person is dealing with those things for which he is directly responsible.

You learn in every field of study or every area of thinking or practice that there are those people who are more or less skilled and those who are speaking from experience and knowledge and training.

When I read a writer who says, scientists tell us.

You know what those words mean, scientists tell us.

Those three words tell me a lot about the person writing.

The first point is he's not a scientist.

Therefore, I treat what he says with far greater care in terms of what I allow to enter my mind than when a professional scientist is speaking, like the crippled British author who is certainly a genius in his field who has written on the question of time in a book that was on the bestseller list a few years ago, Stephen Hawking.

Is that his first name? I think so.

I don't want to get him mixed up with Stephen King.

Someday the knowledge of Stephen Hawking will surprise Stephen King.

It will be a horror story when something happens to the universe, and God intervenes.

That's going to be a shock.

Anyway, you realize in reality that there are people who know more or less about a topic, and the more that a person is respected in his field, the more it pays you to pay attention, and let's say keep the door wider open if it is an area over which you have some control.

Now, if you are not trained in an area, you need to recognize how much information you simply are prepared to pay attention to because you may not have a way of judging it.

If Paul was speaking and he didn't have any scripture to test him, they simply had no way of knowing.

When I hear some people speaking in certain fields, I have no way of knowing.

Therefore, I don't assume that I have to accept what is said or reject.

In the first place, I have no authority to reject and no competence to accept.

I would have to merely say a person who has this kind of training has drawn the conclusion.

Whether I find it later to be true or false will remain for the future, but you have to recognize that when theologians speak about the nature of God, which is, of course, where I'm leading to, theologians are an interesting group of people having debated this subject now for at least 18 centuries.

And so that tells me a little something, that after all this time, there are undoubtedly theologians who know more than others do, but there is no consensus absolutely among theologians.

That's just the reality.

Now, for you to assume that you can make a pronouncement where even the ministry in the church is told that it was not trained as theologians are, I'm talking about the church of God, the seventh day or ourselves, it doesn't matter, any group, no, our training at Ambassador College, unless we did other training, was essentially a training in biblical studies, which is not necessarily equivalent of theology at all.

And theologians are not always trained in philosophy.

So I would only tell you to start with, you have a responsibility before Christ on any topic, this one included, to decide first that if you think you don't agree, or if you think you do, you have the same ultimate decision to make, and that is to stay with the church where Christ is head.

Then you have a responsibility to examine your attitude, because some people are like a few that I know, every new and novel thing is the latest thing they accept.

And then there are those who decide that everything new and different couldn't be right.

And both are making a fundamental mistake.

What you have to do is examine both the kind of mind you have, are you entertained by the new and the novel, or are you somebody who doesn't like to give thought to anything that can disrupt quietness in your life? And in addition to that, you need to examine your attitude toward leadership, and toward the church, and toward Christ.

Because he's looking, and God, the Father in heaven, is looking to see what you are.

Not necessarily what you come to believe, but to see what you are.

Because God doesn't ask you, non-theologian that you are, to try to prove every point that may take theological skills where the Bible gives no clear and explicit answer.

God does not expect you to make a decision pro or con in an area over which you have no control and for which no scripture or no intellectual area of theology has come to your attention adequately to make a decision.

You simply decide that you cannot make a decision.

You don't decide that since I don't know I'm going to make one or the other, because there's a 50-50 chance you're wrong, and if both are incorrect, there's a 100% chance you're wrong.

You don't have to decide everything.

Do you think you have to decide everything in the world that comes to your attention? And of course not.

I don't decide everything just because I hear in music things that I like or don't like as much.

I can't decide that I must make pronouncements in every area of art.

That's a very marvelous verse in Philippians here that was read to you in the Sermonet, chapter 4, verse 8.

Yes, we should examine things that are true, that are honest, that are just, that are pure, that are lovely, that are of good report.

If we're going to be judged for virtue, if we're going to be praised for the decisions we make, we should think on these things.

But that doesn't mean you can all come to conclusions.

I think that's something most of us recognize, but we haven't really given some serious thought to that.

You can't come to conclusions on everything because if you do, you probably are hasty of mind not having adequate facts.

In the question before us of the nature of God, there is a tendency among theologians to guard their turf and to imply that the Bible says less about it than it does.

Among philosophers, there is always the feeling that we philosophers know the answers ultimately because we have the tools to judge whether the conclusions of theologians or other people would be right on the basis of reasoning and logic.

But that ultimately rests strangely on whether your premise is correct.

Reasoning may lead to logical absurdities if the premise is not correct.

Let's understand some things here so we know this is more than just the topic we are on.

There are certain areas in which there is more than merely belief.

There is practice that is involved.

You have to recognize that there is government in the home and government in the church.

There is also government in the nation, and when Christ returns there is going to be government in the world far above what the UN has, which really isn't world government.

There will be decisions made as to what in the church should be taught and what should not publicly.

There will be decisions made in the home as there are also in the nation.

We live in the state of California in which there are certain decisions made with respect to driving.

Now I don't agree with every rule in driving.

I agree with most of them and I think California comes closest to the divine concept.

It says, if you read carefully, there is a principle governing what you do that comes very close to the law, to the statement which says you shall love the other driver as yourself.

California's principles are far better than many which have not been enunciated in other areas because in California we've had to define those principles or we wouldn't be here in some cases.

We would be by the sign of a cross somewhere.

All right, we have to respect certain things and as long as the laws of men do not conflict with the laws of God, we should submit to the laws, well let me put it this way, we should then obey the laws of men or submit to the penalty if there is a conflict.

That's the general principle and teaching of the church.

That's the responsibility of the ministry.

We should respect the authority in the church as to what is being taught.

Now I will say there were times when the church had a certain teaching on the historic background of Passover in the Old Testament where I had the freedom to explain what the church now teaches.

Then there was a time when the church did not have that same freedom and I did not discuss it from the pulpit.

I would tell anybody what verses were involved and why some people drew this conclusion on the basis of these scriptures, why some people drew another conclusion, let's say the church is official position, on the basis of these scriptures.

It is your responsibility to examine the evidence.

It is mine as a minister, at least to tell you what the official position is, not to hide it from you because I don't have that problem happily.

The sermon isn't long enough so I don't even have to address that.

There's only a few minutes left.

But I would be, I think that's what every minister has a responsibility for, that is you shouldn't wake up some morning and realize the church's understanding is way out here and your minister has said nothing about it.

In the home children have a responsibility to conform to their parents' basic decisions and a wife to her husband's and the husband to Christ's leadership here and of course one of the things he should learn is to love his wife and to be concerned for her.

So we recognize we have responsibility to conform if there are things we must do so long as those things do not alter our relationship to Christ.

Let us take an example in the Bible Acts chapter 2 verse 1 where we have just such a thing.

In Jesus' day the Pharisees incorrectly understood Pentecost, the Sadducees incorrectly understood Pentecost.

In each case one had certain truth that the other lacked, the other had certain truth but also a certain error.

The Pharisees were correct when they said that a chief of the first harvest was never to be cut outside of the days, I'm sorry let me correct that, was never to be cut after the days of unleavened bread.

The Sadducees allowed it.

The Sadducees said that the Sabbath referred to with the seventh day of the week.

The Pharisees said it was the first holy day.

Now this is not a time to discuss that but it led to something in the year that Christ died.

He died on a Wednesday according to the official teaching of the church even though other people are getting ideas.

He died and in that year the first holy day was a Thursday.

Therefore the wave sheaf was cut Thursday night in accordance with the tradition of the Pharisees and therefore day one was Friday and day fifty was a Friday.

The Sadducees insisted that the sheaf should not have been cut till the close of the Sabbath and Sunday was therefore the first of the fifty days and Sunday should have been Pentecost.

So in that year Pentecost was observed officially in the community on Friday and on Sunday.

And so the text of Scripture says and this is what it means.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, it did not fully come until that Sunday even though it had already officially arrived in accordance with those who sat in Moses' seat on the previous Friday.

It would have been the responsibility of the community to respect the situation.

Luke respects the situation by defining the fact, just as Jesus said, the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat and do what they tell you to do, even though their works may show that they don't even do some things themselves that they say.

So Acts 2 1 is an illustration of what can happen administratively.

Now we don't have such a problem today, but in that day you would have been expected to pay respect to the authority so that if your belief was indeed that Sunday was the correct day, which it happens to have been in this case.

You would have had a responsibility to do that even if you reframed from certain things on the previous Friday out of respect to those who had defined it as Pentecost.

Now that's an extreme case, but it's a reality.

That can happen.

Happily we have not such a division in the church like that, but we learn that we may have to, shall we say, cooperate and be submissive in areas as long as nobody tells you you can't keep Pentecost on Sunday.

Now when they tell you you can't keep it on Sunday, which is the correct day, and if you try to do so you're going to be expelled, let them expel you.

That's not your responsibility anymore if the church decides that what is right is wrong and that you're not even allowed to do it.

That's not our problem today.

The Sadducees kept it correctly and were allowed to.

That's an important distinction.

In the question of the nature of God, the church has not dealt with any discipline in connection with the subject and doesn't intend to.

It deals with discipline in connection with attitudes, whether you decide to leave the church, both individuals who were prominent in the church for years and have now worked together in a community not this far away, left the fellowship of the church before any discipline was involved.

Today one made a decision to leave, the other made a decision to incorporate while within the fellowship as a competitive organization, just so you know what can happen.

I'm making this plain because in reality we should learn that there can be differences of opinion, don't assume that Mr. Tkach cannot readjust his thinking in some areas.

There was a time he was far more strict than I might have been over makeup and now he has essentially released you from responsibility.

I'll tell you why.

Let me just take a moment of time.

I can finish it with this because the principal governs all of these things.

There was a time, if you wore makeup, you were worldly because nobody in the churches as a whole did unless they were.

It was at that time that when makeup came into the churches, not just the church of God, Radio Church of God, that controversy did arise and makeup was one of the things that tended to demarcate whether you were worldly or not.

And it was a controversy in the church.

Now I came into the church at a time when some women did and some did not before there was any decision.

And I made a decision.

My mother never wore makeup and I will say plainly you would never have caught her wearing makeup.

But that was, she was born in the last century and different people have different perspectives.

I decided that this was God's church and I was willing to sit down by a woman who wore it as well as one who didn't.

That was not a matter between me and them.

That was a matter between them and Christ.

So there was a time when there was a firm decision against, then permission, then a decision against perhaps less firm.

But Mr. Tkach administered it dutifully, sometimes I think more firmly than I might have, because I had originally made a decision in my own mind that I could understand those who did and those who didn't.

There are some women who think they actually do look better.

And I think Mr. Armstrong realized that that was the case, that some women do feel that and it isn't done out of the other things that can be labeled very negatively in particular vanity.

So today the church has made a decision and Mr. Tkach changed his mind.

We decided that makeup shouldn't be the one thing that women have to give up in order to come to the church to learn that they should be baptized.

But that was the practice for a while.

So that has been corrected.

By that I mean that the leadership of the church, just as in any family, can change its perspective as it reexamines matters.

And we should learn to be cooperative.

And if you say that you don't agree, well you have a responsibility to check your attitude, a responsibility to stay loyal and listen, a responsibility to weigh the question, to examine any such question with the scriptures here, and to recognize that there are indeed some areas over which you will never in this life have adequate control to know fully the answer unless there is clear enough scripture to enable you to arrive at a conclusion.

As a minister, I have my opinions regarding certain things, whether it be that every little boy in the church of God must be circumcised or not.

I would say that every Jew who is converted to Christ has a right, has a Jew, to have a son circumcised.

The church teaches that circumcision is not required for salvation.

The church has, generally, had a positive view in this country, less so by the nature of medical science in Britain.

But if you don't know what the answer is for you, you should check out what is, in fact, the evidence and know what you're doing.

Because when you make a decision medically for health or any other area, you become responsible.

Sometimes we cannot make a decision.

We simply don't have all the facts.

Then we submit to the teaching of the church.

If you can't decide for yourself clearly what the Bible is saying, you do have a responsibility to tell your children what the church's official teaching is, tell them why you can't come to a conclusion because you have no skill to enable you to come to such a conclusion.

Or if you do, this is why you agree.

Or if you don't, I have sent a paper in, let us say, you, as a parent, might say, and I did not understand their answer.

We just simply have to say that there can be differences of opinion.

Now, I think if we look at that, we don't have to do what some people want to do.

And that is to decide that the church is the church on the basis of a single doctrine instead of on the basis of the love of God, which is made possible through us by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

There are some visitors here from the Gardena Church.

I had discussed the nature of God already yesterday evening with one of them, and I decided not to focus on that topic here because it's something appropriately that should be developed locally.

But I felt I should give some fundamental background, and I hope what I have covered here sets out the principle, some of which we were discussing yesterday evening, the degree to which you may or may not be able to make a decision and the respect that you accord to people who are responsible for certain areas, either in or out of the church for that matter, over which they have skill and control of information.

Now, all of us, my wife has more control of information in nutrition than I do.

There are things that I rely on her judgment.

Now I don't say I've proved it to myself, and I find that generally her judgment in these areas proves to be correct.

And then I, let's say, I yield to those decisions, and that's what we do.

On the other hand, it doesn't mean that I've proved it.

I don't kid myself.

Now when I am convinced in an area over which I have control of the facts, for me it is not a question that the Hebrew calendar as we have it is the calendar for the church.

I have control over the facts and know how to make a decision for me.

But I think that there are some people who don't.

And therefore, they need to know whether it's their responsibility or not.

And as long as the calendar, let's say, determines the holy days, because the holy days, other than Pentecost, and even that can be affected on occasion by a whole week at a time, the holy days are dependent on the Hebrew calendar.

Just as the revelation of God about the nature of God depends ultimately on how much is here that you can examine and the skills with which you can reason and the premises that you can examine from which to reason.

I appreciate the assignment of being out here.

I hope that what is said here is essential today as a background for any topic and for that matter, for your relationship to the church for as long as you live this life.