

# ONE FLOCK

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*"I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd." (John 10:16)*

*"There will be one flock with one shepherd."*

Jesus is all about uniting the human race as one Family.

The Jewish people of Jesus' day, through whom and to whom He came, were not. Their leaders promoted a narrow, exclusive view of religion, that imagined God as "belonging" to only one ethnic group—theirs. In their thinking, the only path to unity lay in the adoption and practice of the Law given to Moses, as interpreted by the Jewish rabbis.

Even Jesus' disciples had a difficult time opening their thinking to the admission of others outside their own small group. "We saw a man preaching in Your name... Shall we call down fire on them?"

## **The Segregated Church**

In spite of 2,000 years of Jesus' influence and teachings, we are scarcely any farther along. Sunday remains the most segregated day of the week.

Roman Catholics gather in one corner, Orthodox believers in another, Protestants in a third corner, and Pentecostals in a fourth. Within each of those groupings there are dozens more subgroups, often without any significant communication or fellowship between them.

And while our cities are becoming more and more ethnically diverse, many church congregations remain ethnically homogenous.

Shouldn't the local church, if it is authentically alive and thriving, reflect the ethnic and economic makeup of its community? Isn't the local church meant to be the laboratory for developing distinctly Christian culture—faithful, worshipful, welcoming, forgiving, encouraging, truth-telling, cooperative, and empowered—from the diversity of the culture around us, in order to impact the world?

How are we doing with that? Which efforts have been successful? Which need improvement?

## Outlook of Exclusivity

The Jewish mindset in the days when Jesus walked among them was provincial and exclusive. Almighty God had made covenant promises to their forefather, Abraham, and to his descendants. God had given the Law, inscribed by His own hand, to Moses. God had revealed Himself to Moses and to the Israelites, and they learned to call Him by the name Jehovah. As God revealed Himself, He was clearly *not* the same as any of the heathen gods worshiped by neighboring peoples, regardless of how similar their beliefs or practices may have been.

Jehovah was *their* God. The covenants were *theirs*. And *their* system of worship was the only proper one. They were so steeped in these narrow beliefs, and so devoted to preserving them, that most of the leaders that Jesus confronted were unable to recognize the repeated declarations of Scripture concerning God's desire for *all* the world to know Him. If they condescended to admit a Gentile worshipper they only did so on Jewish terms.

In reverence for God, and in deference to the covenants He had made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David, Jesus came "to the Jew first"—a temporary limitation, which was noted by the writer of the most Jewish-flavored Gospel, Matthew.

For instance:

*Matthew 10:5* *Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: "Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans,<sup>6</sup> but only to the people of Israel—**God's lost sheep**.<sup>7</sup> Go and announce to them that the Kingdom of Heaven is near."*

And again:

*Matthew 15:24* *Then Jesus said to the woman, "I was sent only to help **God's lost sheep**—the people of Israel."*

It was the prophet Jeremiah who first called the Israelites "lost sheep":

*Jeremiah 50:6* *"My people have been lost sheep. Their shepherds have led them astray and turned them loose in the mountains. They have lost their way and can't remember how to get back to the sheepfold."*

One aspect of their "lostness" was their notion of an exclusive sheepfold. However, God's covenant with Abraham clearly said (Genesis 22:18), "*Through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed.*" And this merely echoed what God thought to Himself about Abra-

ham before the covenant was struck (Genesis 18:17-18): *“Should I hide my plan from Abraham?” the Lord asked. “For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.”*

So, also, Paul reflected (Galatians 3:8): *“What’s more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’”*

So, God’s idea, from the beginning, was an inclusive sheepfold.

### **The Prayer of Our High Priest**

Thus, as Jesus’ first advent neared an end, He was heard to pray (in what many refer to as His “high priestly prayer” (John 17:20-21)—that which best represented the heart of God: *“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. <sup>21</sup> I pray that they will all be one, just as You and I are one—as You are in me, Father, and I am in You. And may they be in us so that the world will believe You sent me.”*

Jesus prayed for the unity of His sheepfold, His church. In fact, He indicated in His prayer that this unity would be crucial to the conversion of others (*“so that the world will believe”*). He had earlier (John 13:35) announced: *“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”* This was emphatic. The likeness of Jesus is seen in our mutual love—across all social, racial, ethnic, and economic divides. This is not the love of familiar faces, but of former strangers and enemies. This is the love of God. And it only comes one way: *“For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love”* (Romans 5:5). The Holy Spirit pours this love into our hearts to fill the void He found there.

You may be able to manufacture a “love” that looks like this, to make a show, but it will be short-lived. Once on your own, your thoughts will again turn to suspicions and accusations, dividing you from those you pretended to love.

The genuine article, true spiritual unity, puts to death and buries such divisive thoughts and words. The real deal requires the power of God. That’s why Jesus’ prayer included this revealing comment: *“I have given them the glory You gave me, so they may be one as we are one”* (John 17:22). When He said, *“given them the glory You gave me,”* He was referring to the Holy Spirit who was to come after Jesus was glorified. He is the glory of God in our lives.

If you want more of Jesus' love in your life to give to others, the Holy Spirit must have control of you. Jesus told His disciples (Acts 1:8), *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."* The power of the Holy Spirit has an *"everywhere"* emphasis, that carries the love and message of Jesus *"to the ends of the earth."*

The Holy Spirit has one purpose for the church: to unite the body of Christ in love. He demonstrated through Jesus what God's love can do through *one* man. Now He wants to show what the love of God can do through an entire assembly of Jesus' followers, where social, racial, ethnic, and economic divisions have been laid to rest by the power of the Holy Spirit.

RightNow Media currently offers a short, 3-video course, which I highly recommend, called *"One Cure for Racism: the Gospel,"* in which D.A. Horton says, *"The reality is that there is only one race—the human race. But within that race, God has blessed us with a multitude of diversity in ethnic heritages...there is one race, no one is superior to another."*

We are not becoming a church that is *blind* to human differences, but one that learns to *appreciate* the varied colors and flavors of the human family, while *forgiving* the abundant faults and missteps of the family.

Can we become that church? Could we live like this?

Matt Redman sings (We Could Change the World):

*Could we live like Your grace is stronger*

*Than all our faults and failures?*

*Could we live like Your love*

*Is deeper than our hearts could fathom?*

*Could we live like this?*

What we must understand about all this is that it will not take place automatically, just because God wants it. The will of God is inextricably tied to the free will of humans. If He cannot win over the will of individuals through love, then His desires will never be realized. Of course, every day, people do gratefully surrender their wills to His and align their lives with His loving purposes. And this is how we grow, and how the church is built, and how God is glorified.

The will of God—to unite the world in the love of Jesus Christ—is challenging, because it is not in our nature to do so. The process is long, and fraught with difficulty and failures, but God's patience and mercy are longer still. How about yours?

If we are committed to the goal and walk the path with patient forgiveness, we shall see what Jesus died to show us.

It's true in the household of a single family.

It's true in the fellowship of a single church.

And it's true in the wider community of local churches.

What do you contribute to the process? You are already contributing—that's a given—but are you contributing positively or negatively?

How would God like you to change?

What could you do that would most encourage someone else in the direction of loving unity?

Let's pray about that.