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TV OR NO TV, IS THAT REALLY THE QUESTION?

The UPCI is currently at one of its most significant crossroads. At 61 and having attended a United Pentecostal Church all of my life, I am deeply concerned for our future as a movement and as a body. Does it appear to you as it seems to me that we are not just divided, but that we are fragmented, even splintered? What is it exactly that is still holding us together? Are we truly a fellowship, or are we a “loose” collection of “fellowships” which the world would label as “cliques”? Am I missing it or does each of these “fellowships” seem to have its own agenda, whether spoken or unspoken, whether publicly proclaimed or privately whispered?

In my opinion, the side on which any one of us finds himself concerning any of several “issues” seems to determine with whom we are allowed to fellowship. Is it just me or does it feel as though if you find yourself disagreeing with the position of a clique that you cannot even expect to be treated civilly (forget Christ-like) by the members of that clique? “Our opinions and positions” most certainly determine who we are allowed to preach for. To have a relationship with anyone (including a blood relative) outside of one’s issue-oriented clique, we have to keep that relationship a secret or risk being “dis-fellowshipped” from that particular “only-ones-saved” group. In this sad spiritual state, all you have to do is preach for someone disapproved of by the clique and, among the clique, you will take an expressway trip from hero to piñata, from leader to whipping boy.

Does it seem to you as it does to me that only by being on the “right side” of each clique’s issues are you and I considered to be “saved”? If we voice the “wrong” thing or stand for the “wrong” position, are we not certain of being branded as LOST? In my opinion, the Bible and Scripture are no longer the yard stick for measuring ones “Pentecostal orthodoxy.” I believe that the test of fellowship is not “holiness” (as some will try to say it is), but is in fact a person’s loyalty to “our heritage” (which is a “nice” synonym for an odious word — “tradition”). Ones position on our tradition a.k.a. our heritage is, by far, the primary factor being used to “judge” a man’s salvation. Prayer and brotherly love are no longer valid methods to be used in redeeming a “lost” brother. From where I sit, slander, fear, threats, intimidation, alienation, and character assassination seem to be the only tools used by the cliques to “corral” those

who are deemed to be in the “wayward” element among us and bring them back into their “fold.” The fact that anyone sees an issue differently than the other cliques is absolute proof that their sincerity, honesty, integrity, spirituality, etc. are automatically suspect. It seems that if you dare to disagree with their position, you must therefore have some evil ulterior motive because the “pure in heart” would certainly see things their way.

At the beginning of the last century, every person who had an impact on bringing us closer to true Biblical teaching and pure Apostolic doctrine and faith had to challenge the existing religious “heritage” of their day. They had hurled at them every possible threat of damnation imaginable for even considering re-examining in the light of Scripture every long held and “beloved” doctrine and position of their spiritual forefathers. Thank God that they refused to be intimidated by the anathemas spoken against them by the “heritage” lovers who would rather slander or make pronouncements of doom than participate in honest and open Scriptural debate. Thank God that Charles Parham, William Seymour, Frank Bartleman, Glenn Cook, Frank Ewart, R E McAlister, Andrew Urshan, G T Haywood, and many others treasured the Bible over religious institution. We are forever indebted to those heroes of faith (who were considered reprobates and compromisers by their contemporaries) because they refused to be swayed by the names and labels by which their opponents called them. Does the UPCI have any hope of surviving as a relevant, vibrant, spiritual entity in the endtime if the label-givers and name-callers are allowed to set the direction of this organization through intimidation?

“In my opinion the real issue is brotherhood, not TV and its uses.”

THE ISSUE IS NOT TV BUT BROTHERHOOD.

The issue du jour which has caused loose alliances to be formed among the many “fellowships” on both sides of this issue is: whether or not UPCI ministers are going to be “allowed” to preach on TV. But is this even the real issue at all? I do not think so! In my opinion the real issue is brotherhood, not TV and its uses.

“Brotherhood” by definition is a group of people who base their association together on commonality of origin, not on commonality of position on issues. Naturally speaking, if we have the same father and mother, then we are brothers — we are family. Biblically, if we have been saved through the same plan of salvation and believe in the same God, THEN WE ARE BROTHERS IN CHRIST. Loving my brother and being in unity with my brother is not based on uniformity of convictions or agreement on issues. As brothers, we must hold to the same fundamental doctrines of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2) as specified by the Apostle Paul. However, the Apostle also taught that convictions are individually held and must be kept that way (Romans 14 - the whole chapter) in order to prevent strife and division. Are we going to destroy the body of Christ and the work of God because, against clear Biblical teaching, we have decided that the test of fellowship is not commonality of origin but commonality of issues?

Jesus asked, “If you love them which love you what thank have you?” (Luke 6:32). The Greek word for “thank” is the word which is most frequently translated “grace.” In other words, if we only love those in our cliques and cannot love and respect those who hold different positions than we do, what “grace” have we? What evidence do we have of God’s grace working in us? From this verse we can conclude therefore that speaking in tongues and

dressing holy are NOT THE ONLY required external Biblical evidences of salvation!

Do we have a problem respecting and loving our brothers who are either stricter than us in their convictions or those who are not as strict as us? Rest assured there is always going to be someone somewhere who is “stricter” than we are! Consider the “conservative” Moslems or the Amish for examples of greater or stricter “separation.” Is there any among us who believe that they are saved because of their “strictness of separation”? NO! But THESE followers of religion believe that we are infidels and heathen because we are not as strict as they are. From this it is reasonable to conclude that “separation” alone is not the plan of salvation!

Likewise, there is always going to be some brothers who are not as strict as I am. When I was born in 1946, my mother was attending a UPC church. The UPC was just six months old. Being raised in a Navy family, I attended UPC churches in the north, south, west, and midwest by the time I was 18. I can tell you from personal experience that in no part of the country has there EVER been a time when we have all had the same convictions on separation in the UPC. “Strict” churches and “loose” churches (and those in between) have ALWAYS existed in the UPC. This diversity has always been a part of our true heritage. Anyone who declares otherwise is either ignorant of the facts or is being dishonest in order to blindly defend their personal positions and convictions through appealing to our “heritage.”

“...speaking in tongues and dressing holy are NOT THE ONLY required external Biblical evidences of salvation!”

IS UNITY OF THE SPIRIT STILL IN THE MANUAL?

The UPC came into existence based upon and maintains in our FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE this principle: “We shall endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit until we all come into the unity of the faith, at the same time admonishing all brethren that they shall not contend for their different views to the disunity of the body.” It amazes me that in the “Affirmation Statement” which we are required to sign, this fundamental element of our “faith” is not considered important enough to be included in the itemized requirements for continued fellowship. Nevertheless, we all signed applications stating that we would abide by the fundamental doctrine of this organization. Is this part of our fundamental doctrine less important than whether or not someone preaches on TV? This principle is based upon the following Scripture:

Ephesians 4:1-6

1. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,
2. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;
3. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
4. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;
5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism,
6. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Are we oneness people or not? Can I preach with determination and single-mindedness against a divided Godhead and willingly and knowingly participate in dividing the body over which God is head? My body is my body based not upon the uniformity of its members, but upon the very irrefutable fact of their diversity. Each of my members is different and serves a very specific purpose so that the body is able to fully function.

Similarly, each brother I have in this fellowship who is diverse from me is actually more valuable to my goals of being saved and of becoming all that God has called me to be than all the members of my clique combined. It is the diverse brother who challenges me to stay open to God and His Word. It is the diverse brother who stimulates me to grow. It is the diverse brother who provokes me to make my calling and election sure. It is the diverse brother who motivates me to attain to the spiritual nobility of the Bereans (Acts 17:10-12). Thank God for diversity! Thank God for every brother of mine who sees things differently than I do! The most dangerous situation which could possibly exist and threaten my salvation the most is to only fellowship with those who claim to agree with me on everything!

DIVISION IS EVIDENCE THAT WE ARE CARNAL AND NOT SPIRITUAL

“Are we oneness people or not?”

In my opinion, which I desire to share with you without rancor or animosity and with great sorrow, there seems to be little evidence of the spirit of Ephesians 4:2-3 or of the principle in our fundamental doctrine, upon which Scriptures the principle is based, that any observer (casual or otherwise) can currently find in the UPCI. Again, by definition, a brother is defined by God as one with whom I have a common origin, i.e. - same God, same new birth. However, the parameters for fellowship among the brethren seem to have been very specifically re-defined by some vocal elements in our organization in order to require that to be considered their “brother,” you and I must dot all of their “i”s and cross all of their “t”s or they will refuse us access to their fellowship. In fact, it has been my experience that if we do not agree with them, **THEY ARE SURE THAT WE ARE NOT EVEN SAVED.** Sadly, the only thing that they are truly willing to do with us is to attend our business meetings and vote. Outside of that futile exercise, they want nothing to do with the rest of us. Did not Paul call this carnality? Yes! He said:

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

1. And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.
2. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.
3. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

Those who divide the body or threaten to leave the body if their position is not followed by all are carnal, not spiritual (1 Corinthians 3, the whole chapter)! In fact, all of us who facilitate in the dividing of the body by sowing discord among the brethren and / or by participating in strife (Thayer’s - electioneering, partisanship, fractiousness) rather than being peacemakers are carnal, not spiritual!

In Ephesians 5, Paul instructs us concerning marriage that for a relationship to work it requires two key elements: love and respect. The marriage relationship is used by God as a key to understanding spiritual relationships. If this most important of all natural relationships requires love and respect, how can this organization effectively function or even continue to exist when both of these elements seem to be in short supply? True brotherhood requires the existence and manifestation of both love and respect for my brother. The withholding of either or both of these relationship necessities until a brother "lines up" with my personal views is NEITHER BIBLICAL NOR CHRIST-LIKE!

If the resolution to allow UPCI ministers to preach on TV were to pass, absolutely nobody's personal convictions would have to be violated. In NO WAY would this resolution require or demand that anyone preach on TV or advertize on TV. The passing of the resolution only shows respect to those whose conviction is different from what the current manual stipulates and allows them to do so if they choose. Again, the issue is not about holiness standards or TV; it is about BROTHERHOOD!

I repeat: changing the manual will not "require" anyone to go against their conviction against preaching on TV, but it will allow other brothers to follow their convictions without having to risk expulsion or to fear being vilified. Is there a difference between the restrictions on preaching which exists today and those restrictions in the beginning of the early church when religion attempted to tell the disciples where and when they could "preach Jesus" (Acts 4&5)? The issue is not about sin; it is about the gospel. There was opposition to Jesus eating with sinners, but He refused to be told that He could not enter into a sinner's home and share the gospel with them over a meal. Yet religion called Him a sinner and a devil for doing so. Oh, to be so identified with Him over the lost!

Preaching the gospel according to Article I of the General Constitution of the UPCI Manual clearly states **my personal conviction** and clearly defines why I choose to fellowship with an organization whose position on evangelism is so definitive:

"ARTICLE I - PURPOSE: The purpose of the United Pentecostal Church International is to carry the whole gospel to the whole world by the whole church; to establish an effective organized effort; to encourage the opening and establishing of new works; **TO EVANGELIZE THE WORLD BY EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE**; and to produce and maintain a clean ministry and fellowship.

Many of our brethren and I just wish we had the right to believe in, live by, and practice the clearly stated and avowed "purpose" of this organization without being branded as worldly, backslidden compromisers. If we do not believe our purpose as stated, should we not change it? Does not being consistent in our printed positions mean anything?

AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT POINT TO CONSIDER IS THIS: IS NOT PEACE BETWEEN BROTHERS AS IMPORTANT TO GOD AS HOLINESS?

"...changing the manual will not "require" anyone to go against their conviction against preaching on TV..."

Hebrews 12:12-14

12. Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;

13. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Helping and encouraging our brothers, including and especially those whom we consider “weaker” than us, is a test of our Christianity, spirituality, and holiness. The verse included above clearly states that holiness alone is not sufficient to “see God.” Following peace with all men AND holiness are both equally important necessities for those of us who want to fellowship with God both here and for eternity. Castigating, condemning, slandering, vilifying, and judging our brothers are not acceptable methods for obeying Hebrews 12:12-14.

I respect my brethren and would never want any of them to change any legitimately held personal conviction or position which they have taken with their church. All that I am asking is that as a brother (same Father — God and same mother — the Apostolic Church) you respect my convictions also. I am not asking you to change; please stop demanding that I do. My convictions are the product of my own study of the Bible and prayer; they are valid for me! Please respect mine as I respect yours!

“Helping and encouraging our brothers, including and especially those whom we consider “weaker” than us, is a test of our Christianity, spirituality, and holiness.”

WILL YOU STAY OR LEAVE?

Do you know why some who believe we should preach the gospel by all possible means VOTED AGAINST the resolution? Several told me that they heard that some card-holders would leave the fellowship if it was passed. They believed it when they were told that the resolution was divisive! I totally disagree! This issue is not dividing us. The division has existed for a long time. The resolution only brought the division out in the open. Additionally, this division is not going away based on how we ultimately decide this current issue. The issue and the division can only be resolved by love and respect, not by threats of turning in our cards if we do not get our way!

I do not have any intention to ever leave the UPCI. I was born in the UPCI and plan to be in it until I die or go in the rapture. How can I be so sure of this? Because I will not base my fellowship with any of you upon your agreement with me and my opinions. I am determined to base my fellowship with you based upon the fact that you are my brother.

I have no personal knowledge of anyone who left the fellowship because their conviction that we must preach the gospel to the lost through all possible means was voted down or sent to committee. Why? Maybe those who have a passion for the lost also believe in the fellowship of the brethren.

How can we claim to love the lost when we struggle so mightily to love our brothers? Are we truly experiencing significant growth as a movement in North America? It sounds good to say, but where are the numbers to back it up? Are the great majority of our churches

growing at all? Not according to those who travel among them regularly trying to raise funds to support their burden. Could it be that the reason we are not truly growing is: how can we love the lost whom we have not seen, when we cannot love our brother whom we have seen?

Those whose fellowship with us is based upon their success in forcing the rest of us to abide by their convictions are placing issues over brotherhood in their spiritual priorities. Could it be that they are already gone from us? Could it be that they are only waiting for an excuse so that they can blame their leaving on the rest of us "sinners" who do not leave with them?

This body of believers needs all of us regardless of our convictions right, left, or in the middle. Jesus told the disciples to not remove the tares until the time of the harvest, which He said was at the end of the age. His reason for this was to prevent the destruction of the wheat whose roots may be intertwined with the tares. Are there some who are determined to rip out the tares regardless of the cost to the rest of the wheat? Does it not appear that the single-minded focus of some is that either the UPCI will see things their way or they will do their best to see that there is no more UPCI?

There is absolutely no intent in this article to try and persuade any brother to change his personal convictions. Biblically I can debate doctrine with you, but I cannot debate personal convictions with you! The cry of this article is to change our spirits and attitudes towards one another! If any of us truly believes that anyone who does not agree with us on every point of doctrine or conviction is lost, then in fact and in practice we have already concluded that the UPCI has effectively ceased to exist!

BRETHREN, WE NEED TO PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER, FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER, BEAR WITH ONE ANOTHER, AND TRUST ONE ANOTHER. WE ARE EACH GOD'S SERVANTS. GOD ALONE IS THE JUDGE OF HIS SERVANTS! LET'S NOT STRIVE, FOR WE ARE BRETHREN!

cmwright