

1-1-2001

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### Recommended Citation

Siburt, Charles (2001) "Be of One Mind...Anyway," *Leaven*: Vol. 9: Iss. 4, Article 10.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol9/iss4/10>

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# Be of One Mind...Anyway

CHARLES SIBURT

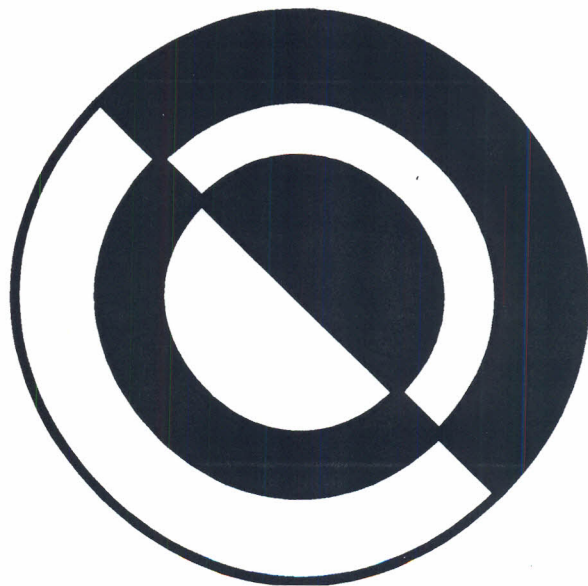
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A well-known minister has served the same congregation for forty years with distinction, but now faces a retirement transition that he does not relish. Though the elders offer him a retirement package that most ministers would jump at, he and his wife do not accept it. They would much prefer to continue their ministry as they have *before*. After months of tense emotional wrestling, the minister and four of the twelve elders leave the congregation to form their own new congregation, taking about 200 members with them.

A congregation of about 150 members selects a few additional elders. At the first meeting of the new “cider group”, one of the new elders informs the rest of the group that he has become an elder to show them how it should be done in contrast to how they have been doing it. After eighteen months of chronic tension, the other five elders can tolerate the sabotage of their opposing elder no longer. They ask him to resign. He says, “I can’t do that. You haven’t made me an elder, God has.” So the five elders choose to resign, thereby forcing the one recalcitrant elder to resign also.

A thriving, large, progressive church is trying to decide on the direction of its future. Will it continue to include the name Church of Christ in its name? Will it remain an a cappella church, or will it include instrumental music as one of its worship styles? Will it endeavor to be a fully “purpose driven church”, or will it instead use more traditional structures and leadership strategies to focus its mission? Some of its founding members decide that they indeed want to be a Church of Christ, not a “community” church, and form their own new Church of Christ congregation. The majority of the church decides that they will remain the kind of church they have already started to be—keeping the Church of Christ name but using both instrumental music and a cappella singing in their worship. The minister and another member of the staff leave to form a non-Church of Christ. The church that had more than 1,000 members is now a church of about 600 members and two new churches have formed out of it.

All the above examples of conflict in churches have several realities in common. In all of them, conflict rose to such a level that some decided to fight and others decided to take flight. In all of them, scripture was quoted, the air was filled with talk about doctrine and beliefs, positions were advocated and defended for the sake of God and his kingdom, and the positions became intractable factions. All of them resulted in failure—failure to sustain the solidarity of the Christian body of believers, failure to fulfill the code of conduct admonished in scripture, failure to obey the specific instructions of scripture.



The problem? It really isn't a matter of heresy—not a problem of denying the essential beliefs of the Christian faith. No, the problem is a failure to follow specific practical instructions about how Christians are to behave in order to achieve or sustain congregational cohesion:

With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:2,3). Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose (1 Cor 1:10). I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment (Rom 12:3). Love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor (Rom 12:10). Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are (Rom 12:16). Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Rom 14:19). We who are strong ought to *put up* with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves..for Christ did not please himself (Rom 15:1, 3). Be of the same mind...Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as **better than** yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:2–5). Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up. . . . Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you (Eph 4:29, 31–32). Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col 3:12–14).

The real problems at the heart of the congregational conflicts described above are not so much doctrinal as attitudinal or behavioral: not enough humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, or effort to maintain unity; an unwillingness to be united, sharing the same mind and *purpose*; thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think; claiming to be wiser than one really is; being haughty; pursuing dominance instead of peace; not being willing to put up with those we consider weaker than ourselves: being motivated by **selfish ambition and conceit**; looking to our own interests, not the interests of others; behavior patterns filled [led] with bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander, and malice, refusal to forgive and love each other. *These* are the roots of our problem. The problem is not that we disbelieve—the problem is that we misbehave. The problem is not heresy; the problem is immaturity.

The solution is found in the behavior modeled and taught by Jesus. Humility, mature regard for others, and wanting to be united more than we want to win makes for peace. Then, even when we disagree, we can be united . . . anyway.

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