

Churches Working Together

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Good morning. I hate that we missed our Friday evening service. That's usually when the glory comes down and it's a wonderful time when everybody is together on Friday night because a lot of the brethren have to leave on Saturday, some already have, obviously. But, you know, God is in charge and we just submit to him and trust him in all of this.

This is an unusual message. Boy, have I wrestled with this concept recently and as much as anything, dove into this truth, if you will, for my own sake. I would start with the premise of what are we doing and the question what are we doing, I mean, as all of us individual churches and individual church plants are connected together and working together and trying to figure out just how that's all going to work and how it's going to be accomplished, how it's going to look, I found myself thinking, "Well, what does the Scriptures say? Is this biblical? Is this right?" And so I just dove into it and here's what I came out with so I hope it's edifying and encouraging to you.

I would use 1 Timothy 3:15 as a foundation stone and then we'll do something of a systematic overview of this truth because there's no one text that exhausts it. I don't like to do that very often. That's very unusual for me I think in this context but, well, maybe not too unusual. But I would usually like to do an exposition but this, I think, I trust, will be an accurate textual systematic understanding of the truth of churches working together in unity and in cooperation.

Paul writes to Timothy, young Timothy, as he continues to disciple him in 1 Timothy 3:15 and he says, "But in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth." Now, the Roman Catholics would tell us that the church is the support of the truth, or rather the source of the truth and that's not what the church is. Local churches are not the source of the truth. You can find the truth listening to a radio because I did driving my car down the road; I wasn't in a church. So the church is not the source of the truth but God has ordained in his providence that the church is the support of the truth. It is the primary means of holding up the truth so the world might know the truth.

If you don't have an outline, would you raise your hand real quick and these guys will get you one. Hurry fellas, we need somebody over here really bad. Can we pass those out over here? Hang on, they'll get to you in just a minute, if you don't mind. I did the outline

at the last minute, just to be honest, because I thought I would want you to take this home and on your own time look at this and study over it and pray over it and gather your own convictions and conclusions about this.

Now, let me go ahead with this premise: the church not being the source of truth but the primary support of the truth. We go a step further to understand that churches need to support one another in their support of the truth. Churches need to hold one another up in their support of the truth and I find this exhaustively clear in the New Testament in the word of God.

Now, if you notice on the outline, I. is creation. What is the source of this unity and cooperation that God intends for his local churches to have? Well, it's a creation and a creation must have a Creator. Man did not come up with this, God created the unity. God created the cooperation we're to have one individual local church to another. I used the text from John 10 where we see one shepherd and one flock. John 10:7, "So Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.'" Down in verse 11, "I am the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep." Then verses 14, 15 and 16, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me." So he says, "I'm the door. You come into God's household, into God's truth, only through me. I'm the good shepherd, I lay down my life for the sheep." He said, "I know my sheep and my sheep know me. They're going to hear my voice and they'll follow me." Verse 15 of John 10, "Even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep." Now, here's the verse that shows this powerful creative truth of unity and cooperation among independent autonomous local churches. He says, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become," here it is, "one flock with one shepherd." That's powerful. Now, we know that the word "church," ekklesia in the New Testament, is almost always used of a particular congregation. It's almost always used of a local visible body of believers. For example, the Bible says "the church at Antioch" or "the churches of Galatia." In other words, almost without exception when the word "church" is used it refers to a local visible body of baptized believers.

Now, we do hold that every church is an independent autonomous body whose only authority is Christ and his word. Amen? No hierarchy out there. There's not a cardinal or a bishop or a pope to which we look to to find out what do we believe and what are we to follow. That's very clear. However, Jesus says, "Even among a culturally diverse group as Jews contrasted to Gentiles, I'm bringing them into the truth so that we will all be one shepherd and one flock." So that's a powerful statement of unity and, I think consequently, a cooperation that would come out of that unity. One shepherd and one flock.

Now look: Jesus creates this. While we are to strive to work toward a unity and a cooperation, it's not something we can create on our own, it's something we discover someone else has and then we find a unity and a oneness because God created it in both of us. And it's amazing how that works. As I've preached here through the years, 34 years now, we have learned at Grace Life Church that if we'll just preach the truth and walk in

the truth as best we understand, God draws the ones he wants in and he repels back out the ones he wants out. Now, you brothers in church plants who have been going a little while, you've experienced some of that breathing in and exhaling, haven't you? Some come in and then they stay awhile and we keep preaching the truth and implementing the truth and then they just wander on back out again. Well, you see, the unity that we have has to be something God does within our hearts as individual Christians and within the hearts of individual churches.

Let's talk about Jesus' prayer for unity. In John 17:11, we'll look at 11 and then verses 21-23. Notice in this high priestly prayer before our Lord goes to the cross, he says, "I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are one." Unity. Now, Jesus knew his struggles were soon coming to an end but he knew his church's struggles were not coming to the end and he says, "Father, keep them to the end that they might be one." Not just keep them, keep them so that they'll be one.

John 17:21-23, "That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me." Their unity, their oneness is a powerful evangelistic tool. The unity of those who follow Jesus Christ is a powerful, if you will, part of our whole mission to the evangelistic effort. Then verse 22 and 23 of John 17, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them," and I think that certainly includes the Spirit in that word "glory," "that they may be one, just as We are one one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity," here it is again, "so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

So we have this powerful...there are other verses we'll look at some more in a moment...there is a powerful foundation stone of Jesus Christ through his merits on behalf of his church has created a unity. Our job is to nurture it, maintain it and flourish in it but it's a creation of God. It came from him. It's his idea. You know, for so long, denominational boards have chastened us and I've heard it since I became a Southern Baptist at age 19 that said, "We need to be united for missions." And often they mean that we are to ignore things that are of glaring seriousness as far as doctrinal convictions and positions. "Let's just all get together for missions." But when you get together for missions on something other than sound doctrine, you don't have the unity God created. You have a toleration of stuff to the end of some pragmatic means and God's not nowhere in it. So we're to have this unity that's not some formal mechanical unity of an ecclesiastical machine but a true and living unity wrought by the Spirit of God. He says, "So that the world may know that You have sent Me."

Now, our unity is not necessarily in equality, our unity is in likeness so as we look at the individual congregations out there, there's not equality. Some congregations are more sound, more mature, more established in the faith than others and so there's a unity in likeness but not equality. To give you an example, Brother John O. Simms had a very challenging church discipline issue a few years ago where a church leader was found to

be in criminal activity and it involved the church and it was a very difficult, grievous, heartbreaking thing that he went through and he did such a wonderful job and followed the word of God. He had involved the civil magistrates so legal issues, the judicial system was involved, but the church was involved and now full restitution has been accomplished, at least to the measure the church required. The civil obligations to justice have been exhausted and the man is restored back into the fellowship of the church and back to his family. Now, here's what I'm saying: I don't have that kind of wisdom and that kind of church discipline. We're not equal in that. He has a maturity in that area I don't have so if I was dealing with, though we've had a criminal issue that we've disciplined but not to that kind of level, so if I were dealing with that type of issue, I would call John O. Simms and say, "You have something here, an experience I don't have. Can you give me wisdom and guidance?"

So we can't just say, "Well, since I'm a church, I've got it all together and I talk to no one, I look to no one, I refer to no one, I get guidance from no one." No, the Scriptures would teach this is a unity, not in equality, but only in likeness. We can learn from each other. We are to help each other. Charles E. Carter said, "Churches cannot do without one another even though they are distinct from one another." It's a very important truth.

Well, let's talk about foundation now. We talked about creation, our unity is a creation God does. We're to work toward it. We're to nurture it but it's God's work. Now the foundation. You have 3 words there: the doctrine, Spirit and discipleship, and I gleaned these out of Ephesians 4:1-7. Here Paul exhorts the church at Ephesus and he says, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Now, I just want to stop right there. Look at verse 2 again, notice the Spirit wrought attitudes, if you will: all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. And I submit to you that a local church must have people who are grounded in sound doctrine and walking in the Spirit for those type attitudes to be present so that you can have a true unity. If you don't have that, you're not going to have it. Brother, I'm telling you, we are all fallen beings. If the Spirit of God does not help us to have all humility, gentleness and patience and show tolerance for one another in love, there will be no unity. It's not going to happen.

Then he continues on amplifying this, "There is one body and one Spirit," notice the unity of this, "just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." So we see here that there is a command to unity here, make sure you preserve the unity of the Spirit, you're to work at it. But there also are some pillars to what this foundation of unity is all about. Three pillars here. First of all, we need to be grounded in true doctrine if we're going to have unity. Let me say that again: we are to be grounded in true doctrine if we're going to have true unity. He says there, "There's one Lord and one faith." Secondly, we need to be empowered by the true Spirit. It's not enough for a person just to tell me, "Hey, let's fellowship together, our church and your church, and let's do missions together," and I find out that really about the only thing we have in common is what we've written on paper about our doctrinal statements. The truth

that you hold to must be empowered by the Spirit and there must be something of a striving to live out that truth in the body of your church. Grounded in true doctrine. Empowered by the true Spirit. And then the evidence should be seen in the walking in true discipleship.

Now, these 3 pillars are so intertwined and interconnected it's really impossible to separate them but I'm going to do it just for teaching sake but my point is if you truly have one, you have the other 2. There is no true discipleship, no true discipleship without Spirit empowerment and true doctrine. You're not really grounded in true doctrine if it's not spiritually enlivened and true discipleship is coming out of it. These 3 always, if you really have one, you really have the other 2.

First of all, let's talk about it one at a time: grounded in true doctrine. He says here, "There is one Lord and one faith," up here in Ephesians 4:5. One Lord and one faith. I believe with most scholars that the word "one faith" here refers to that body of doctrine that was once for all delivered to the saints for which we are to contend according to Jude. Now, we've got to be careful here and be balanced. There are a 1,001 secondary items we might call them in one way of saying it, nonessential doctrines, that we can disagree on. Some people have a little bit different view of administration of the Lord's supper and 1,001 other things but there are cardinal foundational doctrines we must agree on if we are to have unity and cooperate together for God's work and I'll be honest with you, I don't care if that runs some of you off, if that grows Anchored in Truth or diminishes Anchored in Truth, we're going to have doctrine as the core of our unity.

He says, "I want you to be in unity because there's one faith, that body of doctrine we all hold to." One of the dangers of cooperation that we've seen in our denominations through the years is that we tend to drift into a lowest common denominator concept of truth. It's kind of like, "Okay, we don't agree on the inerrancy of Scripture." It wasn't long ago when that was very prominent in Baptist life. Or, "We don't agree on maybe the true nature of the Talmud. We do not quite agree on the nature of Jesus that he was fully divine and fully human. We don't agree on the necessity of the Spirit to bring repentance and regeneration before a man can believe. We might agree on that but let's just, we all do agree that the world needs help." I'm sorry, you have to go somewhere else. I want to know the brothers I work with, the churches we cooperate with, are anchored in truth. Forgive the phrase but I don't know any other way to say it.

True doctrine. The work of missions should be the object of our cooperation but doctrinal truth must be the base of our cooperation. Just running through some things real quickly, I think you have the references on your page and I know you may feel like you're getting a drink out of a fire hydrant a little bit but I do this because I want you to know how thoroughly the Scriptures speak to these things. In 2 Corinthians 11, Paul rebukes the Corinthians about being open to "another Jesus and another Gospel." His point is: you're going to lose what we unite around if your doctrine in these areas goes sloppy. If you let false teachers lead you astray here, the unity goes too.

In Galatians 1:1-10, he rebukes them because some were entertaining the preaching of a different Gospel and he uses the phrase "they are distorting the Gospel." Then he says, "They are disturbing you." So when someone comes in with a contrary Gospel, he says, "They are disturbing you in the sense they begin to break up the unity we had on sound doctrine." The unity goes when false doctrine comes in.

In Galatians 5:7-12, he says, "A little leaven, a false doctrine, will corrupt the whole loaf." Then he says, "I want the one who is bringing in this little leaven of false doctrine to bear his judgment." That's what he says in Galatians 5:10. In other words he's saying: if these guys come in and bring this, they are disrupting what we unite around, that is, being grounded in true doctrine.

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, I think this is on your outline, "If anyone does not obey our instruction," that's his instruction in doctrine in the letter, "take special note of that person and do not associate with him." Now, that's interesting. You're even supposed to burst up any so-called unity if in that unity there is the embracing of false teaching. Amen? They asked me to do a message at the Unity Conference they had years ago and they asked me to give some of the points I thought were good about the rising of reformed theology in Baptist life and one of my points was it produces good splits. That's exactly my point, that we are required, listen to me, required to disrupt any so-called unity that embraces false doctrine.

Titus 1:10-11, "For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision," now these are coming into the church. He's talking to Titus about church life here. Verse 11 of Titus 1, "who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain." Let me say this again: we're not talking about whether or not ladies can wear pants on Sunday night. We're not talking about secondary issues. These are primary doctrinal issues, foundational doctrines of the church.

2 John 1:9-11, "If anyone goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, he does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son." Verse 10, 2 John 1, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds." That is a statement of separation, a dis-uniting, if you will.

So very clearly when Paul writes to the church at Ephesus and he says, "Let's strive to maintain our unity together because there is one Lord and one faith," that means we can only have unity together if all of us are at least striving to be grounded in sound doctrine. That's a pillar that unity stands upon. Now, we have some good brothers who've come into hanging out with us and fellowshiping with us who may not be where some of you are. They just haven't been taught very long. They don't understand some things but they have humble spirits and they are growing and we embrace them with open arms, amen? Because they are striving to be grounded in sound doctrine. You don't even have to be a five-point Calvinist. My wife is only a four-pointer. She's just close to church discipline.

My point is we're all growing and learning and she is too and I am too, amen? She's really 4 3/4. But don't be harsh in your tone and spirit toward a brother who is growing, amen? Let's be loving if a brother is on track and just hasn't got to the station yet.

Secondly, the second pillar here in the foundation is to be empowered by the true Spirit. I've heard the phrase so many times and I'm not saying you're heretical, I know what you mean when you say this, "Well, I tell you what, your doctrine could be as straight as a gun barrel and just as empty." As if there's something wrong with your doctrine being as straight as a gun barrel. "Well, I'll tell you what, I'd rather have wild fire than no fire." Have you ever heard those? Why? Why in heaven's name would you want a false spirit working in your church? Why can't we have true doctrine set aflame by the Spirit of God in God's true church? Why does it have to be one or the other? I submit to you he says there, "There is one Lord, one faith, one Spirit and one baptism," Ephesians 4. So we see here that there's got to be, he says in Ephesians 4:3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit." Verse 4, "There is one Spirit." Why would Paul put that in his exhortation of unity if we are not to at least purpose to discern: are those who claim to know Jesus Christ, are those who want to fellowship in our individual churches as full members and those other churches who want to connect with us to do Gospel work, we should be purposing to discern are they those who are empowered by the true Spirit?

In verse 2 of Ephesians 4 and we'll refer back to Ephesians 4 a lot, that's kind of the foundation verse for this point, he says we're to be striving together "with all humility and gentleness and with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love," and the point is: only the Spirit of God, again, can produce that kind of attitude in a person's heart. We do need to remind ourselves there is a false spirit. There is a false spirit and, by the way, he is a masterful counterfeiter. He can appear like the real thing and unspiritual and unsound or immature Christians can easily be deceived by him. 1 John 4:1 warns us, "Do not believe every spirit."

Now, I think it's on your outline, Ephesians 2:14-18, "For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall," that's Jew and Gentile. If a Jew comes to Christ and a Gentile comes to Christ, the barrier is broken down, they are one. Verse 15, "by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man." Notice the unity. It's just over and over, "one new man, thus establishing peace." Verse 16, "and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity." Verse 17, "He came and preached peace to those who were far away," the Gentiles, "and peace to those who were near," the Jews. Verse 18, "for through Him," here it is, "we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father."

Now, you say, "Pastor, that's kind of a subjective and dangerous thing." It is somewhat mysterious but I do believe we're required to discern: is a congregation striving to be a Spirit empowered congregation? I think it really rides and here's the way doctrine connects to this and they can't be separated: is their view of conversion a miracle work of regeneration or not? Do they lash themselves to the word of God, fill that pulpit with passionate, Spirit anointed Gospel preaching and trust that God's got to save men or we

are sunk? Or are they keeping their numbers up with 1,001 other things that may not be wrong in and of themselves except they've begun to replace the preaching of the Gospel and the power of the Spirit? You can do other stuff. You can do some fun stuff but what we're seeing is people have left off the main thing and replaced the main thing with stuff that doesn't matter and they end up being a non-Spirit empowered congregation. They are not looking to the Spirit of God to use the Gospel to change men's hearts and build God's church. They are looking to something else. That's something we are commanded, I believe, in Ephesians 4 to be discerning about. The empowerment of the Spirit is essential in the building of unity.

Thirdly, walking in true discipleship. I believe this is a third pillar in this foundation of unity that we see from Ephesians 4. He says, "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism." One baptism. Now, there's debate over what this is referring to. Some say, "Well, this is talking about spiritual baptism where spiritually you're placed in the body of Christ." I would agree with that but he is talking to a local church and he is talking to people who have been baptized and I think it includes both of those, both Spirit baptism and water baptism. I think it must include both because the ordinance of baptism is the moment you initiate your discipleship in fellowship with a local body of believers. So true discipleship, if you will, begins with baptism and I would argue with those groups that were so prominent when I first became a Christian at age 19 who would basically say, "If you just meet in our discipleship group on Thursday night, you almost don't even really need the church because you're going to grow in Christ." That's totally wrong. There's only one baptism. There's only one course of true discipleship. It begins with the ordinance of baptism in a local body of baptized believers. Other things may be good but they must never conflict with and must only complement the local church and God's building disciples for his glory in this earth. So a walking in true discipleship.

One thing is for certain: there can be no unity or cooperation among individual Christians or among individual churches if one is striving to walk in true discipleship and the other is not striving to walk in true discipleship. When Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans 16:19, he has an interesting little phrase there, he says, "The report of your obedience has reached all." Isn't that interesting? Not the report of your growth. Not the report of your great music program. Not the report of your great charisma or abilities in the pulpit. He says, "What's really having an impact and what ought to have an impact is you guys in Rome are striving to walk in true discipleship and it has reached to all." What does that mean? It means now there's a unifying effect because your reputation of being true disciples is going to the other churches and so they are opening their hearts to feel like, "Hey, they are one of us." True discipleship in the church is essential for one church to feel a unity and a cooperation with another church.

Well, let's go to number 3. We've talked about the creation of unity and cooperation among churches. It's a creation of God: only God can do the work in our hearts and our churches so that we have what it takes to maintain a true spiritual unity. We've talked about the foundations, there must be a grounding in true doctrine, an empowering by the true Spirit and a walking in true discipleship. Not having arrived, we're all in a process, but a genuine striving for those things. Now the illustration. This might get a little

tedious. I hope it's not too bad but notice 3 areas where I show the New Testament illustrates with great extensiveness, if you will, this unity and cooperation among individual churches.

The earliest days of Acts. We know that as the empowered church went forth from the day of Pentecost, it went forth in unity and in cooperation. The believers there at Pentecost soon began to be scattered primarily after the martyrdom of Stephen. And we know that Philip went to Samaria and he preached there in Samaria and the Bible says many were converted. Now, look on your outlines, Acts 8:14, "Now when the apostles in Jerusalem," that's the mother church, the original church, "heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent them Peter and John." I think that's significant. One church caring for and looking after a new church. Is that not unity and cooperation? I mean, just off the get-go. There it is. The local church in Jerusalem, I might call it the mother church, sends Peter and John to Samaria to mentor and oversee that new church plant.

Now the Bible continues on and says, "Some disciples ventured into Phoenicia, Cyprus and into Antioch." Then the Bible says, "Many came to faith in Antioch." So what happens? Acts 11:20-21, "But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord." Then Acts 11:22-26, "The news about them reached the church at Jerusalem," that's the news about all these believers in Antioch, "and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch." Then the Bible tells us Barnabas went and got Paul and brought Paul back and then they stayed there about a year mentoring and following up on this new church plant in Antioch but it all came from the original church, the local church in Jerusalem. So a powerful illustration from the very first days of the empowered New Testament church of them in unity and cooperation, caring one for another.

Acts also records that the new believers in Antioch sent a love gift back to the mother church in Jerusalem for famine relief. We see that in Acts 11:29-30 and they sent this back to the first church in the care of Barnabas himself. So notice the care back and forth. Notice the cooperation back and forth. Notice the unity.

In Acts 15, there were some self-appointed disciples who left the mother church in Jerusalem, in other words, they weren't sent out by the church elders. By the way, we have little problems with that, don't we? Sometimes young guys become rogue and independent. They want to go off. They found something. They read somebody's book, Brother David, and they know how to do it better than the old guys and so they roguely go off and they're going to do church planting and missions their way. You ask them, "Well, what church blessed you and sent you out?" They'll say, "Well, just God sent us out." Whenever they tell you that, you can say, "That wasn't God." We see that in Acts 15 very clearly. Some self-appointed disciples came from Jerusalem to Antioch and began adding circumcision to the Gospel. Paul and Barnabas there at Antioch debated with these self-appointed disciples who came from Jerusalem and so the church at Antioch said, "Well, we've got to resolve this issue," so they send Paul and Barnabas and some of

the other brethren back to the mother church in Jerusalem to resolve the doctrinal issue and their resolution was also, when they came to a resolution, addressed to the churches at Syria and Cilicia. So here we find this continuing, ongoing unity and correspondence and coordination one to the other.

Now, while there is no specific scriptural command for any local church to seek the guidance of another local church, it does seem wise and it certainly was the practice in the early church that newer church plants voluntarily sought the oversight and leadership of the more mature and established church plants. There is no other example than that. That's the consistent example of the New Testament.

Well, that's Acts. Let's go to Paul's commissioning. This is very interesting when I came across this. When Paul was commissioned to the Gospel ministry, you know, the epistles do give us numerous illustrations of local churches in unity and in cooperation together and how Paul's ministry began is a beautiful picture of that unity and cooperation. We know from Acts 13:1-3, the Apostle Paul was commissioned by the local church in Antioch. Acts 13:1-3, "Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them," that is the church giving their blessing, a local church saying, "We're sending out these missionaries"; "they sent them away."

But here's what's interesting: that seems to be not enough for Paul. Paul didn't want just the blessing of one local church, he sought the blessing of the first local church recorded in the book of Acts. In Acts 15:24-25, "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls, it seemed good to us," that's going back to what I was talking about a little bit ago when some rogue disciples left Jerusalem and went to Antioch and started teaching works salvation, that's what they're referring to. Verse 25, "it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul." So the church at Jerusalem says, "We also give our blessing to Paul's ministry. He is our beloved." A strong picture of unity and cooperation between two local churches in sending out a missionary.

Furthermore in Galatians 2:9-10, "And recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." What is he saying? These are those who are at the church in Jerusalem. They gave to Paul the right hand of fellowship, in other words, giving him their affirmation for their ministry. He said, "we would go to the Gentiles and they would continue ministering to the circumcised." Then verse 10 of Galatians 2, "They only asked us to remember the poor – the very thing I was also eager to do." So here we have a newer church plant, Antioch, and the mother church in Jerusalem agreeing together to send out Paul and Barnabas into church planting and Gospel missions. Is that not a powerful picture of unity of cooperation among churches?

And it goes on and on in Paul's entire ministry. If you just summarize Paul's entire ministry: Paul's ministry was marked by leading local churches to a unity and cooperative effort together. Paul would travel, he would preach the Gospel, souls were saved, local churches were established. He would follow up and disciple these local churches and he would lead them to cooperate together for mutual edification and for missions. In Romans 15, the Apostle Paul holds up the example of giving in the churches of Macedonia and Achaia so he takes 2 churches and says to the church at Rome, "Look at how these folks give. That should motivate you and edify you to give better." In Romans 16:16, he says, "All the churches of Christ greet you." That would be a considerable unity and cooperation for it to even be important that all the other churches are greeting you.

So you have here in this section of Romans, 15 and 16, you have the local church at Rome mentioned. You have the churches of Macedonia mentioned. You have the churches of Achaia mentioned. You have the church in Jerusalem mentioned. Then you have "all the churches" mentioned. That is a vast network of unity and cooperation among churches. In 1 Corinthians 16:19-20, we see the churches of Galatia, the churches of Asia, the church at Aquila and Prisca's house all in a cooperative, united relationship and that was particularly centered around raising money for the famine relief back in Jerusalem. In 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8, you have the Apostle Paul commending the church at Thessalonica for being a good example to the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. He actually words it there, "For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything."

So that's a powerful thing for you pastors to consider. Your example is vitally important to other churches. Did you hear that? You must strive for true doctrine. You must strive to be empowered with the true Spirit. And you must strive that your church will walk in true discipleship because other churches are dependent upon your example. You're not a Lone Ranger. This is exhaustively thorough in the New Testament. What was true in the days of the first century when Paul was the primary mover and shaker in church planting is true for us today. We need each other.

1 Corinthians 14:33, this is kind of neat. The church at Corinth has fallen into proudly misusing spiritual gifts and Paul says in 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not a God of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints." Brother David, in helping the Corinthians get in line, he said, "Look at what the other churches are doing. Look at the other churches. They can help you in this area." Can I throw out a word to you that Jeff Noblit needed to hear years ago? Don't think you've got all the answers. Don't think you know how to get it done. If the Apostle Paul established these original church plants in such a way that he showed they needed each other for encouragement, in this case, 1 Corinthians 14:33, for correction, for edification and to do missions, we need each other for that today.

2 Corinthians 8:24, "Therefore openly before the churches," there it is again. You're influencing each other. "Show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting

about you." 2 Corinthians 8:19-20, "And not only this, but he has also been appointed by the churches to travel with us in this gracious work, which is being administered by us for the glory of the Lord Himself, and to show our readiness, taking precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift." Now, here we have all these churches agreeing together in unity and cooperation that, "We're all going to raise monies and pool it together to help the struggling saints in Jerusalem," and the churches organized themselves and appointed a brother to help in the leading and the administrating of taking up that offering and seeing that it got to Jerusalem. It's pretty interesting, isn't it? I mean, they're getting an ecclesiastical, in one sense, organization to coordinate their work together with a leader leading over it in addition to, of course, the Apostle Paul or alongside and with, in concert with, the Apostle Paul.

In Philippians 4:15-16, "You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; for even in Thessalonica you sent a gift more than once for my needs." So here the Apostle Paul is basically saying, "You Philippians were right with God because you helped me in my further church planting work. You financially supported me and really, the other churches should have been too." Did you read that in there? It's not written that way but that's what he's saying. "You were the first ones to get it. That is, you have received the church planting efforts that we have given you and blessed you now you should be returning them back to help us further plant more churches." Brother Barry, that's a pretty good concept, don't you believe that? As one church gets established it ought to come along and give back to help other churches be established.

Then we have in Romans 15:24 and 28, "whenever I go to Spain," he's talking to the church at Rome, "whenever I go to Spain - for I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you, when I have first enjoyed your company for a while." He said, "I'm coming to you in Rome and I'm going to stay there. We're going to fellowship then I'm pretty much expecting you to support me so that I can go on to my church planting work in Spain." Verse 28, he says it a little more clearly, 15:28 of Romans, "Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain." So could we say the Apostle Paul planned his visit so he could raise money on his way to the mission field? That's exactly what he's doing because it's right for all these churches to sense a unity and cooperation one to the other for the cause of missions.

Well, there's more but that's some illustrations of local churches in unity and cooperation. Real quickly, the exhortation and I would just say the exhortation for us to strive for in unity and cooperation is the Great Commission when the Lord gave this last command before his ascension in Matthew 28:18-20, "Go into all the world and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Is it not true that in that one body of believers he gave that command to, that one local church, if you will, at that time, there was in that local church in embryonic form, every church that would ever be planted? They were the team of

witnesses and as they go out there was in them in embryonic form every other church that would be planted. I think there was just the foregone conclusion and understanding, "We're going to go forth into all the world with a sense of unity and cooperation one with the other. I mean, we don't want to duplicate each other's efforts." Now, the sovereign God had a lot to do with it in the way he allowed them to be persecuted and they were scattered to various places.

Then 3 John 1:5-8, it's very interesting that here in this last epistle, the last book written that we have as our New Testament before Revelation, we have this strong exhortation to support the work in a cooperative sense of church planting and missions. 3 John 1:5-8, "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren," in other words, that's for others, "and especially when they are strangers," they are believers who are coming into your church and you're helping them go on out and continue to minister. Verse 6 of 3 John 1, "and they have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, so that we may be fellow workers with the truth." So here we have this strong exhortation of Gaius and the congregation that he's a part of: you are continuing in this sense of unity and cooperation with other churches by helping support continued church planting efforts.

Now, I jotted together some applications here that I want us to look at and think about on this last page.

1. It's beyond discussion that churches should voluntarily unite and cooperate together. There is no hierarchy to require it. Each church is an independent autonomous congregation under the authority of Christ and his word but the Scripture leaves it without need of discussion that we should voluntarily unite and cooperate together.
2. This unity and cooperation must be founded upon local churches who are striving to be: 1. Grounded in true doctrine; 2. Empowered by the true Spirit; 3. Walking in true discipleship. Not having arrived in those areas but a genuine heart to be striving forward in those areas.
3. Our unity and cooperation is to the end of mutual edification. That's what we're doing here in this conference, is it not?
4. Our unity and cooperation is the end of sending and supporting missions. Certainly, the byproduct, if you will, if not you would say the fruit of our unity and cooperation must be more preachers, more Gospel preaching, more churches planted, more churches built up to help more churches preach the Gospel and more churches be planted. That should be the product.
5. Based on biblical truth, the more mature and longer established congregations should be looked to for leadership. We see that even in the Apostle Paul, him being appointed an

apostle directly by Christ, yet he went out under the authority of Antioch and he sought the blessing of Jerusalem, 2 local churches in his ministry.

6. A centralized organizational structure and mature leaders are necessary to keep the local churches in this united and coordinated effort functioning. There has to be some sense. We saw in Corinth, they appointed a man to help lead in the administration of their cooperative effort to help the saints in Jerusalem.

7. Stop dating mission agencies. Now, I'm borrowing that from Joshua Harris who wrote a little book called "Stop Dating the Church." But if you're not careful, while we should be learning from everyone, if you're not careful, you'll say, "Well, man's sovereign grace looks good. I think I'll connect to them for awhile." Then that gets a little old and, "Well, Nine Marks looks good. I think I'll connect to them for awhile." And, "Well, Driscoll looks pretty good. It's not looking pretty good today but he looks pretty good. I'll connect to him for awhile." Then you just kind of try these guys on and I think what can happen is though there is good stuff and godly men, I commend all of those ministries to a degree, Driscoll I have some problems with on a number of fronts, but I commend all of them to a degree and there's good stuff but be careful that you're not just going here and then here and then here.

There was clear evidence that in the New Testament they went to the one that brought them. You know, I used to have a pastor and he said, "You need to dance with the one that brought you." They brought you to the dance, spend time with them. Connect to the one that brought you and continue on.

Be careful with that. I'll never forget, I had not been in ministry very long when I was listening to Dr. Vance Havner. Dr. Vance Havner was, you ought to pull up some of his old sermons. He had a real prophetic word for evangelicals and Baptists. Brother Barry, Dr. Havner was warning us about the altar call 40 years ago. I remember him ending a service, I think it was in this church, and he said, "I'm not going to ask you to come to the front. You've already done that." He's got this little squealy voice. His point was: you're not saved yet, you've just walked to the front. He was calling out some things before a lot of us were even in the ministry.

Dr. Havner, though, he started preaching at age 12 and he talked about, boy, he was just young and excited and he thought he might do this for awhile, he might be an itinerant, he might go to the mission field, he might pastor a church. He was just excited. He said he got on a train one day to go to a preaching assignment and he looked back there a few rows back and there was R. A. Torrey sitting on the train. He'd been reading Dr. Torrey's work so he had great esteem and admiration for Dr. Torrey is a lot older and so he said, "I've just got to go and talk to Dr. Torrey and maybe get his autograph, you know, whatever." Dr. Vance Havner went back there and sat down beside R. A. Torrey and he talked about this and talked about that and Dr. Torrey said, "Son, what are you going to do in the ministry?" "Well, I might do this and I might do that and I might do that." He said Dr. Torrey looked at me like a prophet out of the Old Testament and said, "Son, set your mind on one thing and get with it." Now, in this whole realm of God's truth that in

Christ Jesus those who are true churches are united and in cooperation, we all need to set our hearts and minds on one way and let's get with it for the glory of God.

Well, that's what I threw together as God just kind of stirred my heart in is what we're doing right as we, really God built this Anchored in Truth mission's church planting thing that just kind of came on. We didn't start to do this, it just happened. We were just pastoring a church and a ministry broke out and that's just the truth. And I want to say this and I mean this with all my heart: it may not be God's will for all of you to stay with us long-term. That's fine. We'll help you and bless you in any way we can but the way the Scripture would say, "Work with those you're connected with until you have a sound reason not to and let's in unity and cooperation go forth together for the glory of God." God may diminish this thing tomorrow. It may go in decline next week. I don't know. I didn't start it, I'm not going to end it. But we do need to unite and cooperate together for the glory of God.

Let's stand in prayer, alright?