Lingering offenses strain relationships between brothers and sisters in God's family. Remember, we are members one of another, and that connection is damaged by offenses. Satan is out to destroy your Christian walk, divide believers, and weaken the body of Christ. He is an opportunist, and he will capitalize on any of our failures to widen any cracks that may appear in our walls.
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THE POWER OF UNITY AND THE DESTRUCTION OF OFFENSE

One of the biggest problems in the Body of Christ today is disunity, and most often disunity starts with someone being offended. Staying in unity and not walking in offense is, I believe, very important to the Father. The root of disunity and offense is pride.

UNITY

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.
Psalm 133:1

An Example of What the Lord Does When the Body of Christ is in Unity Acts 2:1-4

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were ALL WITH ONE ACCORD in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven like a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it set upon each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Importance of Unity at the End of the Age

Ephesians 4:11-16

And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleigh of men and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ, from which the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, making increase of the Body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Jesus gave these "gifts"(apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers) to the church for the following purposes:

1. For perfecting or equipping the saints
2. For the work of the ministry
3. For edifying or building up the Body of Christ
4. ***So that we may come into unity**
5. And into knowledge of the Son of God
6. To a perfect or complete or mature person

I have seen a remarkable restoration of these Five Fold Ministry offices in my lifetime, starting in the 1950s:

1950s: **Evangelist:** Men and women such as Oral Roberts, AA Allen, Jack Coe, and Kathryn Kulhman were greatly used in healing/deliverance evangelism.

1960s: **Pastors:** The Charismatic Renewal of the church saw men like Harold Bredesen, Dennis Bennett, Don Van Hoosier, Jack Hayford come on the scene and model the role of a shepherd over his flock.

1970s: **Teachers:** The Faith Teaching Movement brought us Kenneth Hagan, Kenneth Copeland, Derek Prince, John O'Steen.

1980s: **Prophets:** The Prophetic Movement exploded with Mike Bickle, Bob Jones, John Paul Jackson, Paul Cain, Bobby Conner.

1990s: **Apostles:** The Apostolic Movement brought us men like Peter Wagner and Dr. Bill Hamon.

Why are These Gifts Necessary for Today?

The 5 fold ministry gifts or offices, in proper operation and balance, will bring the Body of Christ both into unity and into a more complete knowledge of Jesus-[remember that Paul said the goal of his life was *to know Him!* (Philippians 3:10: *That I might know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death,* and this word *know*

denotes intimacy.)] So, the Body is not going to come to maturity nor are the Sons of God Company, [which all creation is waiting expectantly for since this company signals the imminent and soon return of Jesus who will come back for a Bride without spot or blemish], going to be manifested without the 5 fold ministry offices and without the church or *ecclesia,* i.e. the called out ones, coming to unity and intimate knowledge of the Son of God, Jesus.

[By the way, the contention that Christ has already returned invisibly and that His return was not in a visible body, but as a spirit, is refuted by Matthew 24:23-30 and Acts 1:10-11. Also, those who set a date for His coming are simply making foolish predictions that are not scriptural. Jesus says in Matthew 24:36: ***"Of that day and hour knoweth no man, no , not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."***]

OFFENSE

Biblical Test of Spiritual Maturity

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth a sharp rebuke: *And I brethren could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk and not with meat; for hitherto you were not able to bear it, neither yet now are you able. For you are carnal; for whereas there is among you envying and strife and divisions, are you not carnal and walk as men?* 1st Corinthians 3:13 He is saying that, when we walk in divisions or offenses, we are carnal believers, not spirit-filled believers.

I have observed through the years that those who are quick to find offense, especially over trivial matters, such

as which side of the church the organ is on, are childish believers who have not grown into maturity. Usually, such people wrongly think that church is about them, when it is really about Jesus.

Paul warns of walking in offense in Philippians 1:9-10: *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ.*

THEN he speaks again of those who cause disunity and offenses in Romans 16:17-18: *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech, deceive the hearts of the simple.*

We are Family

We are all parts of one body, and each of us has different work to do. And since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others. Romans 12:5b NLV

I beg you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that all of you agree with one another and not be split into groups. I beg that you be completely joined together… 1st Corinthians 1:10 CEV

When we have the opportunity to help anyone, we should do it. But we should give special attention to those who are in the family of believers. Galatians 6:10

Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother. Matthew 12:50 NLT

Now the multitude of those who believed was of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed were his own, but they had all things in common. Acts 4:32

Your love must be real. Hate what is evil and hold on to what is good. Love each other like brothers and sisters. Give each other more honor than you want for yourselves. Romans 12:9-10 NCV

My brothers and sisters, God called you to be free, but do not use your freedom as an excuse to do what pleases your sinful self. Serve each other with love. The whole law is made complete in this one command: "Love our neighbor as you love yourself." If you go on hurting each other and tearing each other apart, be careful, or you will completely destroy each other. Galatians 5:13 NCV

For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26

How do we come to Unity and Avoid Offenses?

1. **<u>We love as He loved</u>**.

A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another. John 13:34-35

This I command you: that you love one another. John 15:17

Now you can have sincere love for each other as brothers and sisters because you were cleansed from your sins when you accepted the truth of the Good News. So see to it that you really do love each other intensely with all your hearts. 1st Peter 1:22 NLV

We do not need to write you about having love for your Christian family, because God has already taught you to love each other. And truly you do love the Christians in all of Macedonia. Brothers and sisters, now we encourage you to love them even more. 1st Thessalonians 4:9-10 NCV

This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. 1st John 3:11 NAS

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 1st John 3:14

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the

propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1st John 4:7-11

What if I could speak all languages of humans and of angels? If I did not love others, I would be nothing more than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. What if I could prophesy and understand all secrets and all knowledge? And what if I had faith that moved mountains? I would be nothing unless I loved others. What if I gave away all that I owned and let myself be burned alive? I would gain nothing unless I loved others. Love is kind and patient, never jealous, boastful, proud or rude. Love isn't selfish or quick tempered. It doesn't keep a record of wrongs that others do. Love rejoices in the truth, but not in evil. Love is always supportive, loyal, hopeful, and trusting. Love never fails! 1st Corinthians 13:1-8

2. **We receive the Baptism in Holy Spirit and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, especially peace.**

As a prisoner of the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-5

3. **We bless and not curse.**

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. 1st Peter 3:8-9

Conclusion

I believe many in this place will behold Jesus coming in the eastern sky. He loves and desires His bride. What is holding Him back? He is waiting for a Bride that has made herself ready (By any stretch of the imagination, *she is not ready!!!* I think that is the one thing all believers, whether Traditionalists, Charismatics, Pentecostals, or Fundamentalists can agree on.) The Word says, *For the LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.* (Psalm 110:1, Matthew 22:24, Hebrews 1:13, Hebrews 10:13). "Are His enemies yet His footstool?" *And* "Who is going to make His enemies His footstool?"

We all know that there are many enemies actively working today against Christ and His Church. Our own country has seen a total disregard for our Judeo-Christian values as it has tried to make everything "politically correct." America will reap what is being sown right by our national leaders, and that reaping will be in the form of great judgments on the land. We seem to be walking in much defeat, but beneath the surface there is a powerful "Saints Movement" quietly being called forth by the Living God. The Church will take her rightful place and refuse compromise and be a force to be reckoned with. The Remnant Company of the Last Days, a company of Sons, is being raised up to take back what the enemy stole. This is what all creation is groaning for and waiting expectantly for: *For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God* (Romans 8:19). Galatians 4:1 speaks of immature believers who are

children, not the mature Bride or Sons Company that has made herself ready: *Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all.* The Word contrasts these children to the sons: *Wherefore, thou art no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ* (Galatians 4:7) The children have grown-up. They no longer have a servant mentality but a son's mentality-a son who is in covenant relationship with the Pattern Son and walking in maturity and Unity with the Body.

The Church must come to unity and maturity before the Coming of the King. We in this day will most likely see Christians delivered up to be afflicted and killed, false prophets, iniquity abounding, the love of many becoming cold, the Great Harvest at the end of the age, the Gospel of the Kingdom preached in all the nations, the characteristics of the Days of Noah, and the restoration of Israel both naturally and spiritually. You can study more about His Coming by reading the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24-25.