

What is the Foundation of Our Fellowship?

By Mark Mayberry

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Introduction

Unity in diversity takes many forms. Sometimes it is religious, sometimes social, sometimes political, and sometimes criminal.

On Wednesday, July 7th, the *Houston Chronicle* published a story by Dane Schiller, under the headline “Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms,” describing the arrest and arraignment of 28 people accused of participating in a criminal conspiracy to distribute illegal drugs.

I was struck with the strange and sorted diversity of the co-defendants which included men and women, Caucasians and Hispanics, U.S. citizens, foreign nationals, and illegal aliens, rich and poor, urban sophisticates and good-ol’ boys. According to the article,

One accused drug dealer lives in the suburbs and is the hot-tempered daughter of prison guards.

Another is an undocumented Mexican who drives a purple Hummer...

There is a married Pakistani man with a string of girlfriends.

And a rural wife who has been looking for her ex-con white supremacist husband who went missing and is presumed dead.

Defendants include a woman from Colombia who “looked like she stepped off a magazine cover” and a burly Texan who wore coveralls.

Some players met only by phone. Others are linked by blood, marriage or friendship.

Records and court testimony show the defendants arrested include people from Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Pakistan, Israel, Houston, Beaumont and elsewhere.

What brought them together, authorities contend, is not only an underground pipeline for cocaine and heroin, but exceptionally pure methamphetamine that went for \$24,000 a pound (worth more than gold).

Busting a group moving a few pounds of methamphetamine is significant. But authorities were stunned to find 25 pounds stuffed in a home’s air vent.

And that, authorities contend, is a small slice of what has been at play as many alleged conspirators are part of a family that has been dealing for years and is connected to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel, which operates in northern Mexico. Other defendants lived on the fringes of big-time dealing and were minor players, authorities said.

Every defendant was indicted on the same charge: conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute narcotics. They face 10 years to life in prison.

This story was noted in the Friday edition of "Best of the Web Today," a column edited by James Taranto and published in the online edition of the *Wall Street Journal*, which offers a light-hearted analysis of the day's news.

Sarcastically referring to this *Houston Chronicle* article as "The Feel-Good Story of the Summer," Taranto quips, "Isn't it a nice change to read a story about people overcoming their differences and working together for a common goal?"

What brought this very diverse group of people together? What was the foundation of their fellowship? Simply stated, it was covetousness, greed, and the love of mammon/money.

What binds us together as a nation? What is it about America that so powerfully manifests the spirit of "E pluribus unum," i.e., "Out of many, one"? This motto was included on the 1776 Seal of the United States and officially adopted by an Act of Congress in 1782. Originally signifying that out of many colonies/states emerged a single nation, in the modern era it communicates the melting pot concept, i.e., out of many peoples, races, religions and ethnicities has emerged a single people and nation.

What is the basis of Christian unity? Spiritually speaking, we must ask, "What joins us – a very diverse group of people – together as one?" What connects us as a church? What binds believers as a brotherhood? What underlying principles form the basis of our spiritual "E pluribus unum?"

Is it mere friendship? Is unity based upon the blood ties of family? Is it numbers, i.e., a desire to be part of something big? Or is our union founded upon something more serious and substantial, i.e., a mutual commitment to truth?

Is it Friendship?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon friendship. We associate with those whom we like, and who like us. However, friends sometimes make bad choices. In such circumstances, do we rationalize their wrongdoing, or do we stand upon principle?

The righteous man does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers (Psa. 1:1-6). Solomon said, "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (Prov. 13:20). Paul warned the Corinthians, "Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (1 Cor. 5:6-8). Again, he counseled, "Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals. Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning" (1 Cor. 15:33-34).

Is it Family?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon family. We enjoy interaction with kith and kin. However, family members sometimes make poor decisions. In such circumstances, do we defend the indefensible, or do we manifest conviction?

The Levites were praised for the equitable manner in which they meted out punishment at Mt. Sinai for the transgressions involving the golden calf (Exod. 32:25-29; Deut. 33:8-11). In like manner, Christians must stand for truth, regardless of the effect this may have upon familial relationships (Matt. 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53).

Is it Numbers?

Sometimes fellowship decisions are based upon numbers. In other words, we want to be a part of something big. However, the majority is rarely on the side of right. In such circumstances, what do we do?

Moses said, “You shall not follow the masses in doing evil...” (Exod. 23:1-3). While many travel the broad way that leads to destruction, faithful disciples walk the narrow and lonely pathway that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14). We must willingly face ostracism and exclusion for the cause of Christ (John 9:13-41; 16:1-4).

Is it Truth?

The foundation of our fellowship should be based upon something more than friendship, family, or the desire to be part of something big. It should be firmly established upon our mutual commitment to truth.

When King Hezekiah sought to restore the Passover observance, many scoffed, but others evidenced humility and obedience: “The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord” (2 Chron. 30:1-12).

Jeremiah foreshadowed an age when God would establish His everlasting covenant with the faithful remnant: “They shall be My people, and I will be their God; and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me always, for their own good and for the good of their children after them” (Jer. 32:36-44).

Ezekiel anticipated future days of restoration, when the people of God would forsake idolatry, and share a divinely-ordered unity: “I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them... that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them” (Ezek. 11:14-21).

Such hopes were realized in the apostolic church, as disciples shared spiritual unity, continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, being bound together with one heart and one soul (Acts 2:42-47; 4:23-35).

Conclusion

The church of our Lord is a diverse group, composed of believers from differing backgrounds, experiences, ethnicities, etc. In Christ Jesus, distinctions that otherwise segregate are set aside: there is neither Jew or Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, male or female, rich or poor, barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman (Gal. 3:26-29; Col. 3:9-11).

Despite such diversity, there must also be conformity: we must be obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which we were committed (Rom. 6:17-18), and we must become conformed to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29-30). Accordingly, three questions are of paramount importance: Do you know the truth (John 8:31-32)? Do you love the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-12)? Have you obeyed the truth (Rom. 2:4-11)?

Original Article in the Houston Chronicle

Headline: Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms

By DANE SCHILLER

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One accused drug dealer was a male stripper.

Another lives in the suburbs and is the hot-tempered daughter of prison guards.

There is a married Pakistani man with a string of girlfriends. An undocumented Mexican with a purple Hummer who allegedly exploited his contacts in the gay community. And a rural wife who has been looking for her ex-con white supremacist husband who went missing and is presumed dead.

As some of at least 28 people accused of partaking in a machine that pumped millions of dollars in drugs from a Mexican cartel to Houston and the surrounding area appeared in federal courtrooms over the past nine days, so too did the unseemly and diverse picture of this city's alleged drug runners and sellers.

What brought them together, authorities contend, is not only an underground pipeline for cocaine and heroin, but exceptionally pure methamphetamine that went for \$24,000 a pound. That's more than gold.

Records and court testimony show the defendants arrested include people from Mexico, Honduras, Colombia, Pakistan, Israel, Houston, Beaumont and elsewhere. Some players met only by phone.

Others are linked by blood, marriage or friendship — or know each other so intimately that federal agents sometimes had to suddenly stop secretly monitoring phone calls, as drug-driven appetites shifted conversation from selling narcotics to exploring sexual fantasies.

To stay on the line would violate privacy as the talk was not about alleged crimes.

'Can't stay away from it'

Agents are still connecting dots in a case could expand.

"The users can't stay away from it, and the dealers make so much money," said Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Englade. "As long as it is so pure, they don't care where they get it from."

More revelations are expected in coming months as defendants either confess to crimes in plea agreements or face accusers at trial.

Busting a group moving a few pounds of methamphetamine is significant. But authorities were stunned to find 25 pounds stuffed in a home's air vent.

And that, authorities contend, is a small slice of what has been at play as many alleged conspirators are part of a family that has been dealing for years and is connected to Mexico's Sinaloa Cartel.

Other defendants lived on the fringes of big-time dealing and were minor players, authorities said.

"I have seen nothing to indicate it is a uniform, typical conspiracy group," said attorney Jim Lindeman. "So many of the conspirators seem to be in very minor roles, if they are proved to be conspirators at all."

Outside a court hearing in Beaumont, spouses and family fretted about how their loved ones could possibly be tied to a cartel.

They were as much a cross section of society as the defendants themselves. A woman from Colombia looked like she stepped off a magazine cover. A burly Texan wore coveralls.

A 32-year-old defendant briefly raised her cuffed and shackled hands to wave at parents as she was led from the courtroom.

They later talked of getting her help with addiction.

Every defendant was indicted on the same charge: conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute narcotics.

They face 10 years to life in prison.

Sources:

Dane Schiller, "Diverse picture of alleged drug runners emerges in courtrooms," *The Houston Chronicle*, July 7, 2010, Copyright 2010, Houston Chronicle.

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