

# ALAN TAYLOR

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## True Gospel Unity

As a young, twenty-one-year-old youth pastor, I received my first piece of hate mail. This was long before the days of the internet, social media, or email, so it came as a handwritten letter from a fellow pastor in our city. It was twelve pages detailing how I was a terrible pastor, not going to Heaven, and that he would never be able to forgive me.

Back in high school, I had begun to serve God seriously. In my senior year, a few of us decided to create an end-of-year celebration for the Christian students as an alternative to the official school grad party. As strange as it sounds, in my province in Canada, it was legal to buy alcohol at eighteen. So, the school figured it was a good idea to throw a fully sanctioned, alcohol-fueled party in a field somewhere, complete with buses to take all the grads out to drink and dance the night away. The logic was: better they drink in a field than drive drunk around the city.

Unsurprisingly, most of the Christian students didn't want to attend because of the party atmosphere. So, two others and I decided to organize a wholesome Christian celebration full of fun but without alcohol. It was a huge success, with hundreds of youths showing up. Fast-forward a few years, and I'm now a youth pastor leading the largest youth group in the city. That same celebration was handed off to a leader who worked within the schools, and he carried it forward year after year. It continued to grow and became a popular alternative to the grad party madness. Then, one day, I got a call inviting me to bring my youth group to the new version of the celebration—and that's when the trouble started.

They'd decided to shift the event's focus in hopes of drawing in more unchurched youth. Part of the new strategy included having a live band play secular music; that's where I started to struggle. As a pastor overseeing young believers, I felt a deep responsibility to protect what they were being exposed to, and worldly music was an issue I couldn't just brush off. I wasn't naïve. I knew most of the kids listened to secular radio even though I encouraged Christian alternatives. But for the church to become the source of that influence? That felt like a contradiction. We were trying to lead our youth out of the world, not drag more of the world into the church. I asked them: "They get enough of that from their schools and friends—should the church also be the source of worldliness?"

Now, if the event had been clearly framed as an outreach to the lost and the secular music was simply a tool for that mission, I could have understood. In fact, I was more than happy to send some of my mature leaders to be involved. But that wasn't enough. They wanted full support. I wasn't trying to be "holier-than-thou." I was just trying to be faithful to the standard I felt called to live by. That's when the letter came. Honestly, it hit me hard. I knew I wasn't the most mature leader at the time, and maybe I could have handled things more diplomatically—but even now, I still stand by the decision I made.

Many church leaders said I was causing division because I wouldn't submit to the plan. After all, it was "a good work," wasn't it? Reaching lost souls? They told me that we needed unity and agreement among the churches for God to move in the city. For years, I carried the weight of that, wondering if I had somehow been the reason for the lack of revival in our city. That is until I truly

understood what Scripture teaches about unity. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:1-2: *"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

Many interpret this to mean we should negotiate our standards to reach some kind of mutual agreement. But I don't believe that's what Paul meant. It's not my place to correct another church's ministry—they are accountable to God alone. The unity Paul talks about isn't corporate agreement for the sake of peace—it's something deeper. The next verses reveal the heart of gospel unity: *"Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross."* (Philippians 2:3-8)

We're commanded to individually let the mind of Christ shape us. When I'm operating from the mind of Christ, and you are too, that's when true unity is born. As you continue praying in the Spirit and allowing His mind to be formed in you, don't be surprised when it draws opposition. It's tempting to compromise for the sake of peace, but that kind of unity is just religion. And there's no power in religion.

Real power, the kind that changes families and cities, comes when we rise together in agreement with Jesus, not just with each other. In moments of accusation or pressure to conform, know this: God is using the standard He placed in you to challenge the counterfeit around you. Stay strong. Stay faithful to what He has spoken, even if others don't agree. True victory is coming by His Spirit.

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