

God Has Spoken

Tract Series

The Basis of Unity

In the 1980s churches of Christ were beleaguered by those who called for unity with sectarians of all stripes. It was commonly preached, “There are Christians in all the sects.” The call for “unity in diversity” was so prevalent that lectureships were scheduled, discussion groups convened, and books were written on the topic. Practically every periodical journal ran articles – and even theme issues – on the question whether churches of Christ have – or should have – unity and fellowship with other churches.

What goes around comes around. The same thoughts are again being preached among us in the second decade of the 21st century. In a new generation we must ask, “What is the basis for unity among those who want to please God and go to Heaven?”

To answer the question it is necessary to understand the terms in use. “Basis” means “the underlying support or foundation.” “Unity” is a word found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as follows.

Psalm 133:1. *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*

Ephesians 4:3. *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Ephesians 4:13. *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 fulness of Christ:*

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

(Hebrews 1:1-2)

The Hebrew word (“yach’ad”) in the psalm is in scripture 142 times translated variously “together,” “altogether,” “alike,” “likewise,” “withal,” “knit,” “even as,” “both,” “at once,” and once as the negative “none at all.”

The Greek word “henote’s” used twice in Ephesians and nowhere else in scripture means “unity, unanimity, agreement.”

Though the word “unity” occurs but three times in the Bible, by definition it may be found in the teaching on “agreement,” “fellowship,” “togetherness” and “brother-hood.”

The heading of this tract implies that there is one single supporting basis of unity. With that the inspired word of God resoundingly agrees.

Genesis 13:7-8. *And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram’s cattle and the herdmen of Lot’s cattle: and the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land. And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we be brethren.*

Matthew 23:8. *one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.*

Philippians 3:16-20. *Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. 17 Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. 18 (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: 19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) 20 For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:*

In this epistle to the church of Christ in Philippi Paul plainly describes (verses 18-19 above) the walk of life that does not lead to salvation. In verse 16 he would have us all to follow one rule. In verses 17 & 20 he would have us to identify those among us who walk according to the one rule given out of Heaven, and to follow their example.

Can Christians follow another example – another walk, another rule – and please God?

The Bible is man’s authority in all questions of this type. When men had a religious and moral question, Jesus asked, “Have you checked it out in the book?” (Matthew 19:3-4). When a question bore on eternal life Jesus told a man to “Remember what the book said” (Mark 10:17-19). When one

wanted to know what was necessary to be right with God Jesus asked him, “What did you find in the book?” (Luke 10:25-26). Thus, the Bible is our recognized authority in answering the question, “What is the basis of unity?”

Light: the Word. “We have fellowship with one another,” according to the words in I John 1:6-7, “if we walk in the light.” Psalm 119:105 shows us that the word of God “is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Can Christians walk with those following another word and have fellowship with them?

Gospel: the Word. Paul urged saints to be “with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27). But the gospel is the Word of God (I Thessalonians 2:9,13).

Can Christians have unity with those striving for a different faith?

Apostles’ Doctrine: the Word. In the beginning of the church the basis of their continuing together was the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:41-42). Paul later wrote that the word of God is sound doctrine (II Timothy 4:2-3).

Is any person continuing in another doctrine actually a Christian?

The basis of living godly lives in preparation for the coming judgment is the word of God (II Timothy 3:12 - 4:5). The prophet Hosea wrote (chapter 6, verse 5) that by the words from the mouth of the Lord are sinners slain. As He silenced Satan Jesus instructed us that by the words from the mouth of the Lord are the righteous preserved (Matthew 4:4).

Are the righteous preserved by ignoring some of those words? By following others?

Unity based on the word of God was the rule in the days of the apostles for those who heard the preaching of the Spirit-endowed preachers.

Speak the same. *Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment* (I Corinthians 1:10).

Endeavor to keep that unity. *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing*

one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:1-3). Chapters 4 & 5 stress that unity was based upon Paul's teaching by such words and phrases as *the body, unity, in him, members one of another, one to another, one another, among you, partakers, fellowship, submitting yourselves one to another, and members of his body.*

Growth from unity. The book of Acts testifies to the effect of unity based on the word across the civilized world in the days of the apostles. Because they heard the word the church grew (Acts 4:4). Because they solved problems by applying the word the church grew greatly (Acts 6:1-7). When faithful Christians acted in unity in the face of persecution many churches had rest and were multiplied (Acts 9:29-31). When Christians were further taught the word they were established in the faith and their number increased daily (Acts 16:1-5).

The Bible itself, rightly divided, is the Basis of Unity. That puts the "burden of unity" squarely on our shoulders who are the children of God. We must every one "give diligence to shew ourselves approved unto God, a workman who needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15). In order to achieve the kind of unity among men that results in God's fullest spiritual blessing on earth, and eternal life with Him in Heaven, we must every one, like the Bereans, be "more noble, searching the scriptures daily" (Acts 17:11). Only then will all believers be one as the Father and the Son are one, and only then will the world believe as frequently as it did in the first century, and only then will the church grow as it did in the first century and be as pleasing to God as it was in the first century.

By definition there is no unity – there is no fellowship – between parties following different teaching and practices. Christians who join themselves to those different ways separate themselves from God's way. Believing and obeying some of what the apostles of Jesus taught is not walking "in the light as He is in the light." Standing with those who are partly in agreement with God stands us partly out of agreement with God.

Additions, subtractions, modifications – any change in or departure from the word of God as the apostles and evangelists preached it at the beginning – will divide people from one another and from God. Only when we respect the Bible "as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (I Thessalonians 2:13) – and do exactly what it enjoins upon us – can we know that we are saved from sin and pleasing to our Perfect Judge.

(A. L. Parr)

To be Saved

1. **Believe** that Jesus is the Son of God (John 20:30-31; Acts 8:37);
2. **Repent** from sin (Luke 13:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38);
3. **Confess** that belief in Jesus as Christ (Acts 8:36;38; Romans 10:9-10);
4. **Be baptized** in the name of Jesus for forgiveness of your sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 4:7, 12; Romans 6:3-7).

And Then

the Lord **added to the church** daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47).

And Jesus said to the Father

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; **That they all may be one**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

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