

Unity

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"Unity" is defined by Webster as: "1. the state of being one; oneness; singleness; being united. 2. something considered complete in itself; single, separate thing. 3. the quality of being one in spirit, sentiment, purpose, etc.; harmony; agreement; concord; uniformity. 4. unification. 5. a group or body formed by this . . ." (New World Dictionary, College Edition).

This definition will help us to understand what unity is as opposed to the pseudo unity claims of a number of brethren today. God's people throughout time have desired unity upon the true basis of unity.

Is unity possible? God commands it of His children (1 Cor. 1:10). Christ prayed for unity among his disciples through his word (John 17:20-21). The Holy Spirit taught unity as a requirement to be right with God (Eph. 4:1-6). We are to practice the same thing (1 Cor. 11:1). We are to wear the same name (Acts 4:12). To maintain unity in Christ we must all speak the same thing (1 Pet. 4:11). The only standard by which unity can be attained is the Bible. The word is complete (2 Pet. 1:3), and God will not allow any changes in it (Rev. 22:18-19). It will completely perfect a man unto every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

How Division Comes

Division comes by the doctrines of men (Matt. 15:9; 2 John 9-10). Carnal minded people are determined to follow courses that are charted by their carnal senses and drives rather than by what the word of God says.

The idea of trying to devise a way to unity would never have been conceived had it not been for the fact that Bible unity had been broken because someone "caused division."

I believe it is vital to the subject of unity to have some historical background of the divisions that have ripped through the churches of Christ over the past 135 years, but space does not permit this material to be presented at this time. My objective now is to view the impact of some unity movements on the church. I will mention only enough to make sense of my points.

The first major rupture of the harmony and unity of churches of Christ in this country came in the middle of the 19th century. The organ was introduced in the worship at Midway, Kentucky in 1849 over the protest of many in that congregation. It resulted in a division. Instrumental music had caused divisions among many denominations by 1849.

One thing is conspicuous, the causes of division in churches always occurred before in some denominations. It seems that most brethren have always had the inclination to think like Israel of old, and require a king to rule over them "like the other nations." When these breeches in the faith and unity have occurred, the next step is chiasms, some method to "join" with those of the denominations about them. Then in the course of time, they always want to "get together" with their former brethren and form some kind of relationship by which they can feel accepted. They seek a

compromise, which they usually call "Unity Forums" or "Unity Meetings." In other words, they propose a platform that would provide for the unification of the Lord's church with all denominations who wanted to join. It would simply be a federation of religious bodies, something akin to the Federal Council For Churches Of Christ Of America, or National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches.

Error is error, and it will not be changed into truth by the declaration of some renowned cleric, or the pronouncement of an international synod. Truth is truth by its very nature. It, like history, can not and will not be changed. Whether I know the truth or not is another matter. The fact that truth and error will remain what they are, makes it impossible for the two to be brought together in any kind of "Unity Movement" that will have any degree of acceptance with God. Unity of the faith must be "oneness" of belief and action based upon what the word of God authorizes.

Some Early Efforts for Unity

Unsuccessful efforts were made about the turn of the century to find some basis for unity, but the Instrument advocates and the promoters of the Missionary Societies would not give them up, and brethren faithful to the word of God could not allow these innovations in the church; so the division not only continued, but the chasm widened.

About 1938 James DeForest Murch of the Christian Church and Claude F. Witty of the church of Christ spent seven years talking about Unity, but they never achieved it. They developed what was called the Murch-Witty Unity Plan. They wanted brethren to come together and worship, but they wanted to allow each to hold their respective views. Anyone who is casually acquainted with the issues of that day would understand the utter impossibility of this position.

Another series of efforts were made by a few preachers in the 30s and 40s to reconcile premillennialism with the faithful of the Lord. These were forms of "unity" efforts to create acceptance of the false doctrine that had divided the churches.

When the institutional innovations and promotions invaded the church in the 1940s and 50s which developed into full grown divisions by the 60s and 70s, bitter and deep divisions came into congregations all across the nation. It was a rerun of the divisions of a century before over the instrument and missionary society. Many of the arguments and positions were exactly the same, only the subjects were different. Only those who lived through that time will understand the depth and bitterness of that division.

In the 1970s several preachers who were then moving toward Pentecostalism in their views of the work of the Holy Spirit, miracles and speaking in tongues, made a great impact in sections of Tennessee, Texas and California. Three or four left the church and became denominationalists in every sense of the word. Their influence turned several churches into Pentecostal churches, and today they have a voice pleading for acceptance with the brethren they left.

A philosophy known as "Crossroadsism" originated with Chuck Lucas and the Crossroads Church of Christ in Gainesville, Florida in the late 1960s. It has cult characteristics and uses the intimidation

methods of recruiting members. It has caused divisions in churches all over the nation, but they plead for unity and acceptance by those they have offended. Of course, they will not cease their false teaching.

Why Unity Movements Fail

Simultaneous with this were the movements of Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett. Several others are in full accord with them and have been for years. In their estimation, they have moved to an upper intellectual and spiritual level, and they have found truth about the great restoration brotherhood and fellowship based upon the faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Nothing else really matters. They have abandoned all conditions of discipleship but acceptance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Their pleas for "Unity in Diversity" are well known to those who have read much from the periodicals and journals of the past twenty five years. Unity in Diversity is a false unity. It is an agreement to disagree, but they call this relationship "fellowship." The real problem of division still plagues all involved; what they say about their "unity" does not change the fact that they are not the same and do not agree in vital matters of belief and practice.

Impact of Unity Movements

What impact do these unity movements have upon the church of our Lord? From among several that could be mentioned, I selected these:

1. The first real impact of the unity movements of the kind I have described among churches of Christ is the loss of respect and love for the word of God. During the efforts to find agreement on a subject that separates brethren, the sense of compromise will often cause some to believe a lie and be damned, because they did not have the love of the truth (2 Thess. 2:10-11). The compromise of the truth by a few influential men and women in a congregation can take that whole congregation away from the faith. The tendency of unity movements is to affect the church with less love and knowledge of the truth.
2. It stifles the thinking and conviction of babes in Christ. New converts are often influenced by the advocates of some doctrine of man that fractures the unity and harmony of the church. These babes are taught that things forbidden are accepted by the Lord. They learn that "there are many ways that are right."
3. It weakens the church by compromises with false teachers and denominational error. One of the pillars of strength of the church is its sanctification from religions of men. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:17). The unity movements have the effect upon the church of destroying that distinction from religious error. Of course, the promoters of the unity movements would say they are not in error. If not, there should be no division.

4. It stifles the study and search for the truth by the youth in the church. Youth is naturally in search for the unknown, and the ambitious find the right answers. When the more mature in the gospel differ over major issues taught in the word of God, and some of them suggest that we all are right: we should just agree to disagree - that is what the unity movements really are - they are discouraged from searching for the answer in the word of God. The whole church becomes weak in the faith, and strong in the social gospel.
5. It generates further division in the body and really hinders progress toward bringing about the unity based upon the truth of the gospel. It always proceeds to a great and disgraceful division before the world, and hinders the preaching of the gospel to the world.
6. It makes all churches appeal to the world standards rather than the divine standard. A usual claim for the promoters of these unity movements and meetings is the impression and appeal the church will make upon the world if we stand together, even if we disagree on some minor points. Of course, all points of difference are minor to them. Their appeal is to the world rather than to God. The religious world did not like the preaching of Peter and John (Acts 4:1-22). Neither did they like Paul's preaching (Gal. 4:16).
7. Every such unity movement seems to foster an ever enlarging class of professional clergymen, who are being trained to deal more with social, psycho social, economic and philosophic matters than they are with spiritual things. The deeper we get into the unity movements, the broader the base becomes for these things of this life, and the less need they have for the Bible. The simple reason is that the Bible is no longer a text book for the faith and the way of life.

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Preacher of the Word (Vol. 1, October 27, 1996, #44)
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