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'UNITY WITH WHOM'

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When Christians begin to hunger and thirst and pant and yearn for "unity," or for "Christian Union," they will do well to "use discretion." Unity is not achieved by a federation of churches nor by a compromise or toleration in the matter of principle. Jesus prayed that His disciples should all be one; Paul instructed that they "all speak the same thing," and that is not accomplished by compromise. But it seems that when some Christians become obsessed with the idea of "Christian Union," they go haywire and run with outstretched arms to embrace any one who looks like a prospect. Even some well-informed preachers and teachers are very "open-minded" and ready to clasp hands with any who will agree to walk a wire or ride a teeterboard. Some will even forget the Scriptural system of being "purged from old sins" in order to federate with any who "claim" to be a disciple of Christ.

That is "broad-mindedness"; much broader than was the prayer of Jesus. He said to the Father, "I pray not for the world." He was making arrangements at that time to do something radically different for the world, something that would do them much more good than praying for them. He caused some "good

seed" to be sown in the world, or, the gospel of the kingdom was to be preached to all the world, to every creature. The world still needs the gospel instead of prayers of misguided religionists. If they will not receive the gospel, all the prayers of all the world can do them no good. But Jesus did pray for one, just one, class of people: "Neither pray I for these (apostles) alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their (the apostles') word; that they all may be one." (John 17:20,21). That was the extent of the prayer of the Saviour, and no disciple of His is authorized to pray for any other class, except to pray for all men, all rulers "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life" (1 Tim. 2:1,2); not that they may live to have unlimited opportunities to obey the gospel.

Faith and Unity

The Lord thus prescribes a limit to the thought of unity. If it were possible for men to believe through some mysterious visitation of the Holy Ghost, as a great many religionists teach, Jesus does not direct His disciples to make any overtures

toward unity with them. John said he wrote his gospel to produce faith: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through His name." (John 20:31) If any one can so manipulate the human mind that he can get faith in some other way, he is not a proper subject of unity for which Jesus prayed. Such faith could not have the proper Scriptural basis, hence, could not be pleasing to God. "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17) is the God-given system of obtaining faith.

Christians cannot be pleasing to God when they enter into any semblance of unity with people who get their faith (or think they do) in any other way than by hearing the Word of God. Jesus said he "that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." (John 6:44,45) People who do any "coming" or any incentive other than "hearing and learning of the Father" do not "come to Christ," hence, they will be poor material for followers of Christ to regard as capable of unity. Their faith is all wrong, hence, their obedience is wrong, and the only way they can attain to that unity for which Jesus prayed is to "repent and believe the gospel." Yes, that is good Baptist doctrine to put repentance before faith, but see if it will not work that way in such cases. People with that sort of faith cannot please God, because "it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," and the gospel is the thing that Jesus commanded to be preached. (See Mark 1:15. In this passage Jesus is talking to Jews. They already believed in God; so were told to "repent" of the sins they had committed toward God, and then "believe the gospel" of Christ. - Elam B. Kuykendall, Editor of *The Graphic Evangelist*).

"Who then is Paul? and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed?" (1 Cor. 3:5) If those preachers were instrumental in bringing about their faith, how could it be called "a miraculous faith," a direct gift from God, a miraculous work of the Spirit? "Whether it were I or they (Paul and other apostles), so we preach, and so ye believed." (1 Cor. 15:11) "Because our testimony among you was believed." (2 Thess. 1:10) Shall

Christians who follow the teaching of the Lord enter into "union meetings," with people whose faith rest upon visions, dreams, impulses, messages of angels, instead of resting upon those things the apostles wrote? Should Christians even desire unity with such religionists? Can they even recognize such misguided religions as being Christian? A good fraternal order, a lodge, which makes no pretense of being religious, would seem as acceptable as such unauthorized churches.

The Dividing Wedge

But if Christians are going to "unite" with somebody or something, who will they approach with their appeal for unity? The Christian church (or as of today, some liberal church of Christ. - EOB), to be sure. They "have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine," and must be regarded as brethren in error. Yes, they may be regarded as proper subjects of unity, for their faith is supposed to be based upon the words of the apostles, hence are included in Christ's prayer for unity. When they are approached on the subject of unity, there must of necessity be a foundation upon which to "unite." The movement for unity indicates within itself a "division" over something. If we all "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine," there was unity that far. There was something later on that caused a separation, a parting of the way, that must be sought out and overcome. Somebody left "the strait and narrow way," or there would be no cause for a move toward "getting together"; we would still be together.

Any move toward unity that does not take cognizance of that which destroyed the unity is worthless. The wedge which caused the split must be removed before the rift can be overcome. A wedge may be driven into a tree and divide it; then it may be wrapped and bound up with the wedge still in there, but it will not grow together again. So the tree surgeon has but one course to pursue, and that is to remove the cause of the rift. The cause of the rift between Christians was that some departed from "the faith," from the Word which produces faith; they failed to "hold fast the form of sound words," and

If our Lord preferred a church's being completely cold to being lukewarm, what do you suppose His view would be of those comfortable with the kind of unity sought by the unity movement described in "Unity with whom"?

Since that article was written, another major division has occurred over church supported institutions, centralized arrangements for church work and the nature of church work. The lines have been pretty well drawn in most localities for some time now. As it was after the previous division there are a few who are beginning "to hunger and thirst and pant and yearn for 'unity'." While they emphasize "how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity", they seem not to understand that it is not good and will not be pleasant very long for brethren to dwell together while still divided in sentiment over matters that affect the very nature and structure of the church - if either side has any real convictions.

I just believe that brethren around here would take a dim view of things if I reported in this paper that talks had been taking place between members of the congregation where I attend and a nearby Christian church with a view of uniting the two congregations into one under the following arrangement:

1. A receptacle will be placed in the church building where all members could deposit their contributions to

the Missionary Society, Endeavor Societies, Ozark Bible College, College Press, etc.

2. The regular and gospel meeting preaching will be divided equally between preachers from "churches of Christ" and the "Christian churches"
3. Congregational meals will be retained, but the food will be paid for by individual rather than from church funds.
4. Meetings of other churches (both "churches of Christ" and "Christian churches") in the area will be announced without discrimination. Those who attend the meetings will be called on for prayer, to lead singing, or participate in public activities regardless of which of these two kinds of churches they may be members.
5. There will be no instrumental music in the worship services.

I wonder how much difference would it make if I reported that those with whom I work were willing to effect such a union, but it was turned down by the members of the Christian church? How much difference would it make if the other church was called a "church of Christ"? What would brethren think of this congregation if it never publicized anything contrary to what I reported. As I said, brethren, I am just wondering. - Editor.

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followed things "contrary to sound doctrine," and did not remain "sound in faith" - "sound in speech." They ceased to be them that "tremble at His word."

The Spirit of Worldliness

That class of disciples erred from the faith by appropriating things that were not "of faith" because they had imbibed too much in the spirit of the world. What was it that made any Christian desire a mechanical instrument of music in Christian worship? The instrument made it more attractive and pleasing. To whom was it more attractive and pleasing? They were supposed to "make melody in your heart to the Lord." Did ever any say he thought it sounded better to the Lord? Oh no, it sounds better to the people; the young folks are attracted by it. If the young folks are attracted by instrumental music, they are not drawn by hearing and learning from the Father. Other things: Missionary Society, Endeavor Societies, attractions of various kinds, are all acknowledged drawing cards to the world, and are not supposed to be more pleasing to God. The spirit which prompts all those things is not the Spirit of Christ. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His; so if advocates of such innovations are "none of his," what godly man or woman should desire a unity move in their direction?

Until the spirit of worldliness by which they are actuated can be replaced by the Spirit of Christ, who did always those things which pleased the Father, there can be no hope for unity - unless we long so fervently for unity that we will "move over to the middle of the teeterboard with them," which, I fear, some old fogies will not do. A "preachers' conference for unity" that fails to make any attempt to "remove the wedge," or even to mention the cause of the rift, is about as useless as a convention of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and Infidels, and has accomplished about as much good. A gospel preacher who could attend such a conference as a speaker, and then commend it as being a great meeting, surely is lacking in that "backbone" which Paul expected Timothy to manifest as a Christian soldier in 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

It should not be forgotten that being a Christian is a personal obligation, a duty which each one must work out for himself, and unity cannot be dosed out wholesale to entire congregations. Nor can a half dozen limbernecked preachers answer for the entire brotherhood, not even for one congregation. [Editor's (Billy J. James) note: This article was written many years ago in the Bible Banner. Yet it seems as if it were written last week. As you know the church of Christ and the Christian Church are exploring the matter of unity. As of yet, they have not begun or started to begin to remove the rift that stands between us. And I believe, brethren, they won't and if they come to any sort of togetherness it will be union and not unity - compromise and not truth. My prayer is that I am wrong, but it appears that this is the way some churches are going."]

-- Stand, (12-85)

via The Graphic Evangelist (4-13-85)

SOME COMMENTS ON "UNITY WITH WHOM"

It is written "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1), but it is written again, "Can two walk together unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

The article, "Unity with Whom?", appearing elsewhere in this issue was written shortly after the lines were pretty well drawn between those favoring missionary societies, instrumental music, etc. and those who opposed them. Generally speaking, those who favored such things became known as a "Christian Church" (there were and still are exceptions). A congregation that opposed such things was called a "church of Christ". At the time that article was written there were efforts being made by some to work out some kind of working arrangement whereby the two groups could get back together without anyone having to change his convictions on these matters. I shudder to think of what would have happened to the cause of truth had they succeeded. I thank God that there were level-headed and courageous men like the author of "Unity with whom" who had the enough good sense and courage to write