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The Third Party To Unity

History has shown that nearly every period of intense religious controversy has been followed by near frantic calls for unity and reconciliation.

The often bitter sectarian strife of Protestantism, with its divisive creeds, that leaders of the "restoration movement" were trying to remedy, has now given way to the modern ecumenical spirit of this century.

The heated controversies over missionary societies, instrumental music, and related matters that resulted in wide-spread division in the church during the late 1800's and early 1900's is another good example. As the division was completed and the heat of controversy cooled somewhat, some, well-intentioned, men widely circulated their calls for some kind of reconciliation. Unity plans were published. Unity forums were held. Reams were written and read on the subject - pro and con. The result? More division -- between the hard-liners and compromisers!

I have preached through most of the controversy and subsequent division over church-support of human institutions, sponsoring churches for brotherhood projects and church sponsored social - recreational activities. I know, first hand, the heart-break of division (even within families) and the tears that can be shed wishing that there could be some way that division would not come - or that it could be reversed after it did come. I know what it is to plead with brethren to "keep the unity of the Spirit" to no avail. I understand why brethren will go the second mile to establish, maintain or restore unity. Unity is pleasant and good (Psalm 133:1).

So, if unity is so good and pleasant and we are willing to go the second mile for it - why are we disturbed by the rash of "unity plans", "unity forums" and calls for "dialog"?

In their zeal for unity, perhaps a reaction to the bitter experience of division, most of these become so obsessed with the idea of unity that they make it an end within itself; too often ignoring the real cause of the division.

Christians are charged with the responsibility to "keep the unity of the Spirit". (Eph. 4:3). The unity that we are charged to "keep" is the unity described in Ephesians 2:14-18. It is a three-party unity. It was not a unity worked out by negotiation and dialog between the divided parties (Jew and Gentile) - but a unity brought about by reconciliation of each party unto God resulting in unity between all parties: God, the Jew, and the Gentile. The "unity of the Spirit" that must be kept cannot ignore the third party - God. No matter how much unity may be desirable or pleasant it is not good unless reconciliation (fellowship) is maintained with God. So, the real road to unity is not "talks" or "dialog" just aimed at getting us together again - but a study of God's will for His church and an effort to convert all to His will.

(Continued on back page)

"Why didn't you talk to me?"

Bill Hall

"Why didn't you talk to us?" ask the hurt parents as they face their son for the first time after he had run away from home, leaving them panic stricken for five long days.

"Why didn't you tell us you felt this way?" asks the grieving husband as he begs his "fed-up" wife to return home and give it another try.

"You could have called to verify the report before going into print," scold the "innocent" elders, who have just been exposed for leading the congregation into yet another unauthorized activity.

"Doesn't the Bible say to go to the offending party alone?" asks the person whose ugly attitude and presumptuous moves have just precipitated a major crisis within the church.

"Why didn't you talk to me?" everyone is asking. How cowardly it make the other person look! How unconcerned! And, in some cases, how disobedient to the Lord's simple command! But the truth is, in each of these cases, the person didn't "talk" because he knew that any approach he might have taken would have set off a major explosion. There are just some people you can't talk to. They get mad. They fly off the handle. They threaten you. They misrepresent you. They will do anything they can to destroy you. Step into a cage all alone with a roaring "lion" or vicious "tiger?" Yes, the Lord expects us to do so occasionally, but we can be pretty understanding if a man turns a bit "cowardly" when confronted with such a possibility.

No, we are not saying that all are unapproachable. We have talked with both types, with the approachable and the unapproachable. We know literally hundreds of Christians who we would be willing to approach about any question. But we also know of some who are terrors. We would just about as soon come face to face with a bear (and probably accomplish about as much - Editor) in the woods as to have to talk with them.

BILL HALL IN OUR SPRING MEETING

Brother Hall, the author of this article will be with us April 24-29, preaching the gospel each night at 7:30. Why not make arrangement now so that you can be with you for every service.

Genuine Christians are "easy to be entreated" (James 3:17). They receive others with humility, meekness, and understanding. They know how to approach others when a problem exists, and they know how to receive others. While "contending earnestly for the faith," they refuse to be of a contentious spirit. They "suffer long" and are "kind;" they are "not easily provoked;" for they love others (1 Cor. 13:4-8). They exercise self-control. Recognizing the possibility of error in their lives, they appreciate efforts on the part of others to correct them, even when they are convinced that the correcting ones are in error themselves.

Two needs exist: Self-evaluation and repentance. Each must ask himself "Am I among the approachable ones - as a husband, as a wife, as a parent, as a preacher, as an elder, as a fellow-Christian - or am I one of the terrors who tends to explode whenever anyone crosses me?" Improvement is possible. The welfare of a Bible class is at stake; or the welfare of the church as a whole; or, of greater consequences, eternal happiness.

What is "Baptism"?

"Baptism doth also now save us" - 1 Peter 3:21 (KJV)

Bible "baptism" is an immersion by definition, by description, and by demonstration.

It is generally conceded, by students of Greek of various religious persuasion, that the word translated in most English translations, "baptism", literally means an immersion or dipping. Even men like Adam Clarke (in his commentary on Romans 6:4), who himself practiced sprinkling, admit that immersion was probably the ancient practice. Hence, if one relies on the definition of the word itself, he would be immersed.

Twice, in the Scriptures, baptism is described as being "buried" in baptism. (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12). Hence, being described as a burial would certainly suggest immersion. One is not buried in sprinkling or pouring.

We also have the divine record of the baptisms of various ones in New Testament days. These examples clearly demonstrate to us that baptism is immersion.

John the Baptist baptized in Aenon "because there was much water there". (John 3:23). When he baptized Jesus, he came up out of the water (Matt. 3:16; Mark 1:10). When Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch, they came to the water (Acts 8:36), "both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him." Now, if the baptism practiced was sprinkling, then it would not have been necessary to Jesus to go into the water. It would not have been necessary for either Philip or the eunuch to have gone into the water, much less both. In fact, it would not have been necessary for them to have come to water if there were any at all aboard the chariot. It would take less water to sprinkle a person it would take a good drink.

Why was such a baptism in water necessary at all? Was it just an "outward sign of an inward grace", or did it have something to do with salvation? Peter wrote that "baptism doth also NOW save us" (1 Pet. 3:21), while many today are saying that "baptism doth also NOT save us". I prefer to believe Peter. That Peter has water baptism in mind is clear from verse 20, where he writes that eight souls were "saved by water". Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16).

Other descriptions of the salvation and the saved relationship, in the New Testament, ties salvation and baptism together. To be saved is to have "remission of sins". Those on Pentecost were told to "repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). To be saved is to be a "child of God" and to be "in Christ". Children of God, by faith, are those who have been baptized into Christ" (Gal. 3:26,27). To be saved is to have a new life. Those buried in baptism are raised to walk in a new life (Rom. 6:4). To be saved is to have our sins washed away by the blood of Christ. Paul was told to be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). To be saved is to be added to the church, the body of Christ. The saved were added, by the Lord, to the church (Acts 2:47). Christ is said to be the "savior of the body" (Eph. 5:23). Those baptized have been baptized into one body - the church (1 Cor. 12:13).

So, what is baptism - Scripturally speaking? It is an immersion in water, in the name of Jesus Christ (by His authority), into His body, in order to be saved.

EDITOR

UNITY (from page 1)

I believe I am right on the issues that have divided us and "other side" is wrong - because both cannot be right. I would not spend my time teaching what I believe if it were not so. I am willing to go anywhere that is expedient to tell anyone what I believe and do my best to sustain my position by the Scriptures; in view of converting another to what I believe to be the truth of God, so that we both can hold to God's position - thus establishing unity.

I am just as willing to hear another who holds the opposite position do his best to sustain his position by the Scriptures - this in view of converting me. If he can show me from the Scriptures that his position is indeed God's position - then I will repent of error, embrace the truth shown me, (thus, establishing unity) and be just as strong in that position as I now am in my present position; and will believe that those who have the position that I now have are wrong.

But, most "unity plans", "unity forums" and "dialogs" that I know anything about are not designed (nor have as their aim) to really change any basic beliefs but rather to work to soften all convictions to the point that they can be ignored and brought into some kind of forget-our-differences working arrangement under one banner. The idea seems to be to be an effort to bring brethren together with as little pain as possible - especially the pain of admitting error and coming to repentance on anyone's part.

It is generally emphasized by the advocates of these plans, dialogs and forums that the division can be solved by more love, concern and communication between the opposing parties. It could be IF the cause of the division had been hatred, unconcern or lack of communication. But, the division over the above matters did not come nor is it maintained because brethren did not love each other, or were unconcerned about each other, or would not talk with each other. It is far deeper than that. It was over opposing views of the basic Scriptural nature of the Lord's church, its mission, and the proper application of divine authority. Before real unity can be restored someone will have to change his views on these matters and repent - regardless of how much love, concern and communication exists - simply because you cannot ride two horses going in opposite directions.

About all that is accomplished so much talk of how we need to love and communicate more is that of shifting attention away from the real cause of the division and encourage brethren to forget their convictions or else compromise them so as to present united front. A front is all it would be - a vaneer! When seasoned men do it is strengthens the notion of weak brethren and some too young to remember the real issues involved that it was all a peronality fuss between brethren with improper attitudes toward each other. What a shame!

United? Yes! But, with God first - then my brethren.

EDITOR

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES Second Class

Sunday Morning Bible Classes... 9:45 A.M.
 Sunday Morning Assembly.....10:45 A.M.
 Sunday Night Assembly..... 6:00 P.M.
 Wednesday Morning Bible Class..10:00 A.M.
 Wednesday Night Bible Classes.. 7:30 P.M.

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