



# Light from the Word

## The Faithful Church: Biblical Unity

“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 17:21).

How important is unity? There are two areas where Christ emphasized the impact that the relationships between His followers will have on a lost and sin-sick world. In John 13:34&35, sometimes referred to as the Great Commandment, He said that we would be known by our love for each other. In very similar fashion, in His “High Priestly Prayer,” Jesus said that the world will know the love of God and that He was sent by God by the oneness (unity) shown by His disciples (John 17:21-23).

We can understand the meaning of unity in the Scriptures which call us to it. In 2 Cor. 13:11 we are enjoined to “*be of one mind.*” In Phil. 1:27, Paul exhorts, “*stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.*” In the next chapter, he calls us to be “*in one accord*” (Phil. 2:2). And Peter writes, “*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous...*” (1 Pet. 3:8).

Of course we know that we must clarify that it is biblical unity for which we must strive. The world has many areas where unity is sought around various things including political issues, business approaches, clubs, trade associations, etc. We are not called to seek unity around such earthly things but rather to follow the model of Christ who was one with the Father. “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*” (Phil. 2:5). Biblical unity will be directly related to our relationship (oneness) with the Lord Jesus. Thus the Word exhorts us to learn of His meekness and humility; to walk in the Spirit, in His love, in truth, and in sanctification (Matt. 11:28-30;

Gal. 5:16; Eph. 5:1-2; 2 John 3-4; John 17:17).

The world is able to achieve unity by gathering people who are already of the same mind – in essence dividing into groups based on backgrounds, biases, perspectives, likes and dislikes. This is not the unity and oneness which Christ prayed would be our lot as God’s children. Rather He desired that those who were first united by becoming one with Him—in finding salvation through faith in His shed Blood—would grow together in spite of various differences which might otherwise serve to divide. Each of us has preferences, biases, opinions, and even personal convictions which can be strong and self-affirming.

When we are placed “in the Body” (1 Cor. 12:18), we lose our independence and self-possession. We gain an appreciation for Christ’s view of His church and learn to value all members of the Lord’s Body. We discover the benefit of the “foot, hand, ear and eye” that make up the Body; its “comely and uncomely” parts; those which seem more or less “honorable.” We realize our own lack of the fullness of what is needed in the Body and begin to abhor the thought that our flesh might say, “*I have no need of you*” to any of those for whom Christ died (1 Cor. 12:21).

God’s Word is clear that unity of the brethren is pleasing to Him; “*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*” (Ps. 133:1). Unity is not optional nor is it automatic. Indeed we will need to work at it. Paul uses the word endeavor which evokes more than a mere “trying” but a diligent and ongoing striving and exertion to accomplish this biblical imperative. “*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*

— Please turn to pg. 55

# Continued Articles

## Biblical Unity

— Continued from pg. 3

*Spirit in the bond of peace*” (Eph. 4:1-3).

Unity and love are closely enjoined. Just as love is not simply an emotion but rather a conscious choice and action, our efforts to become of one mind and one accord require deliberate and ongoing attention and discipline. Unity requires mutual submission. It realizes that one’s own perspectives are limited and that we benefit by yielding our will to God and one another (Eph. 5:21; 1 Pet. 5:5). It is interwoven with commitment, humility, mutual submission, and self-sacrificing love.

Again, we understand through the teaching of Scripture that unity is not the same as uniformity. Paul recognizes differences in the church when he explains, *“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administration, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all”* (1 Cor. 12:4-6). God did not create any two people exactly alike, nor can we become someone else. But we can yield our willfulness, dying to self and submitting to each other in love and for the furtherance of the gospel and the well-being of

the brotherhood.

This will involve each of us realizing that the definition of unity is not ours to decide in isolation or as a particular group. There is a strong human tendency to divide into sub-groups around particular points of view, perhaps cooperating to influence others or even resisting God-ordained authority – whether in government, the workplace, families, or the church. Previous editorials have dealt with faithfulness in Commitment, Submission, and Love; all of which are needed to be faithful in biblical unity.

For a number of years, the Elder Body has been working to increase biblical unity in our brotherhood. Satan has not been sleeping and much turmoil and strife has arisen to frustrate those efforts. All too often resistance has come in the form of brethren taking too much upon themselves to determine the definition of biblical unity. The Word calls us to Christ-like love which reveals humility, and an avoidance of strife and division. It motivates and empowers us to a sustained, committed effort to grow in our understanding of each other and work for greater unity (1 Cor. 13:4-7; 3:1-4; 12:25).

*“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his*

*life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16). Surely laying down our life would include honoring, preferring, and submitting to one another in love.

Paul recognized this ongoing and sustained work in the church in holding out the vision and standard of persevering in it until *“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”* (Eph. 4:13).

*John 9:4-5*

*I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.*