



# *Foundations of*

# FAITH

## The Basis of Christian Unity Lesson 25

The Psalmist of old sang, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" ((Psalm 133:1) Never has there been greater need for this blessing than today. Religious confusion abounds and the unity for which Christ prayed in John 17 is not apparent.

The solution to religious division is not simple. That which has been centuries in the making cannot be wiped out by a single stroke. Yet, who dares suggest that the prayer of our Saviour cannot become a reality?

**THE CAUSES OF DIVISION.** Before a positive basis of unity can be established, the causes of division must be removed. Let us note some of them. First, ignorance of God's word is a contributing factor to division. Many years ago the Prophet wrote, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." (Hosea 4:6) Today, nearly every home has a Bible, but too seldom is it read. General ignorance of the scriptures makes the common man the prey of false teachers who promote the doctrines of men and sow the seeds of discord. Many are unable to distinguish between truth and error because they do not know what the Bible teaches.

A second cause of division is a human tendency to follow men rather than God. Paul admonished the Corinthians to follow him only as he followed Christ "Be you followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." (I Cor. 11:1) While we cannot get along without leaders and teachers, we should not follow them blindly since Jesus declares, "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch." (Matt. 15:14) Some are even

taught that they should allow their pastors to do their religious thinking for them. It is argued that the Bible is too difficult for the common man to understand. This is not true. Paul speaks of "the simplicity that is in Christ." (II Cor. 11:3) The gospel is so simple that it produced a unified body of Christians over 1900 years ago, even though most of these people were relatively uneducated. Certainly we should be capable of understanding the inspired words of the Holy Spirit. Let us follow religious teachers only to the degree that their doctrines coincide with the scriptures.

Underlying most religious divisions are the doctrines of men. Division comes from a lack of agreement over things taught. Of two opposing teachings both cannot be completely right. And since we are to "hold fast the form of sound words" (II Tim. 1:13), we dare not compromise with false teaching. Division, resulting from a conflict of truth and error, is actually caused by the doctrines of men which have begotten the error.

Human creeds and confessions of faith are yet another factor in religious division. They are the embodiment of the doctrines of men. Of course, not everything taught in creeds is error, but that creeds contain much error is evident when we observe that no two of them are alike and that most of them are contradictory. Human creeds crystalize false doctrines and stand as a great barrier to religious unity. No denomination will accept without alteration the creed of another. But if each religious body will surrender its creed and unite with Christ upon the one source of

authority recognised by all, the Bible, a great stride toward unity will have been made.

Denominational names are still another cause of religious division. Initially most such names were used for the purpose of distinguishing one sect from another, but to many these human names have become so sacred that they are held in higher esteem than the name Christian. But no single denominational title will ever be accepted by all striving to follow Christ. If unity is ever to be attained, these names must be forever forgotten.

Finally, religious division is caused by denominational organisations. This has already been suggested by the mention of denominational creeds and names. Not only are the creeds and names opposed to Christian unity, but the religious bodies of which they are a part are also a barrier. Some have suggested that all denominations might combine their forces into a gigantic denomination, with each body maintaining its distinctive creed and name. This would be a union, but not unity. Unity implies a likeness of thinking and action which could not be true with the above plan. The hard, cold fact remains that unity can never be attained until the whole denominational system with its various organisations which have been responsible for perpetuating division is a thing of the past.

**THE PLAN – UNITE WITH CHRIST.** The mere removal of the causes of division will not produce unity. A positive basis of agreement must be found to replace the present system. **Many past unity efforts have failed because they sought to unite men with one another instead of uniting them first with Christ.** Christ is our common denominator. We may never completely agree with each other, but we should be able to agree with the Saviour of mankind.

Unity with Christ implies complete acceptance of his absolute authority. He himself declared, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. 28:18 – A.S.V.) With the words, "Go ye therefore" ... Jesus then delegated that authority to his apostles. Their teachings as well as those of Jesus himself are found in the inspired New Testament books. Therefore, to unite with Christ we must accept the complete and sole authority of the New Testament writings. All of us who believe that the Bible is divinely inspired recognise that the New Testament is authoritative. We agree that the things written therein are truth, and while we may not agree upon

every small interpretation, so long as we will speak in the words of inspiration and leave our own opinions out, we may find unity on the word of God.

Acceptance of the authority of the New Testament, in turn, implies that we will strive to duplicate the pattern of apostolic Christianity which is revealed in those twenty-seven books. Paul presents the platform for unity when he declares, "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 long suffering, **forebearing one another in love**; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is **one body**, and **one spirit**, even as ye are called in **one hope** of your calling, **one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all**, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:1-6) Here are seven things upon which we may unite. Underlying them all, Paul states, is love. For regardless of how much agreement we may attain on doctrinal points, there can never be true unity unless there is a love which makes us want to be one.

We have little difficulty in accepting the fact that there is but one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, and one God. Even in its present divided state the religious world largely agrees upon these matters. But this same passage also teaches that there is but one body, one faith and one baptism. Since we are informed in Colossians 1:8 that the body is the church, we must agree that there is but one church, the undenominational body belonging to Jesus Christ. We must recognise that since there is but one faith it does make a difference what we believe and teach, and that only that faith based on God's word is acceptable. Furthermore, we must acknowledge that there is but one baptism. Since that baptism is described in the New Testament as being wrought by immersion in water, only when we accept that form may we have unity with Christ and hence with one another.

Unity of the faith cannot be accomplished without our duplicating the church of the first century. To do this we must teach the way of salvation as taught by the apostles, showing that when penitent believers are immersed into Christ, they procure his atoning blood which washes away their sins. We must duplicate the congregational organisation of the early church which was devoid of any hierarchy and which recognised Jesus as its only head. We must worship as did the primitive Christians, in Spirit and in truth. (The

organisation and worship of the church will be discussed further in succeeding lessons.) We must perform the same work performed by the primitive church – that of serving man and saving him from sin. We must wear the name Christian, without denominational prefix or suffix, as did the first century disciples, being in truth undenominational Christians. And we must conduct our personal lives in such a way as to reflect the glory of Christ and cause our fellow men to recognise us as a people called out of the world of sin. When we have done these things we will be one with Christ, and united with all who have united with him.

**IF THE WORLD DOES NOT UNITE.** The above plan for unity may seem unattainable. Certainly, it is unlikely that everyone will agree to accept the authority of the New Testament, even though most might do so. However, this need not prevent individual disciples and congregations from uniting

with Christ. To the degree that we are one with Christ, we have attained unity. If a congregation duplicates in teaching and practice the pattern of the early church, it is helping to promote the unity for which Christ prayed. But when that congregation departs from the primitive pattern it is contributing to religious division.

And what of the individual? How may he promote the cause of unity? Suffice it to say that he cannot do so while engaging in those things and being a part of those organisations which make for division. Neither can he do so by living completely apart from a congregation of fellow Christians. He should seek out a group of simple New Testament Christians who practice the things revealed in the Holy Word and who are content to be undenominational disciples of Christ. He should not rest until he has found such a congregation, and when he has found it, he should labour with his fellow heirs of life eternal to make Christian unity a reality for others.

TEST ON LESSON 25

**List six causes of religious division:**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....

**Fill in the blanks after reading the following passages that discuss some of the unities shared in this lesson – I Corinthians 8:4-6; Ephesians 2:13-18; I Corinthians 12:11-14:**

Though there are many that are called gods, to us there is but one ..... the Father, and one ..... Jesus Christ. He is our peace and has broken down the middle all of partition between the Jews and Gentiles and has made one new ..... of them. They have been reconciled to God in one ..... by the cross. Through him we have access in one ..... to the Father. As the ..... is one, so also is Christ. We are baptised by one ..... into

one ..... We have been made to drink into one ..... However, the body is not one ....., but many.

**Underline the phrase which correctly completes each statement:**

1. Paul told the Corinthians to: (a) follow him; (b) follow Christ; (c) follow him as he followed Christ.
2. If error is taught, we should: (a) hold to the truth; (b) compromise with the false teaching; (c) ignore the error.
3. The combination of all denominations with each maintaining its distinctive creeds and name would produce: (a) unity; (b) union; (c) perfect harmony.
4. To unite religiously, it is necessary first to: (a) agree to disagree; (b) form a new denomination; (c) unite with Christ.
5. If we unite with Christ, we will also: (a) adopt creeds to explain his teachings; (b) accept his absolute authority as revealed in the New Testament; (c) insist that others adopt our opinions.
6. The religious world largely agrees that there is: (a) one God; (b) one faith; (c) one baptism.
7. The one baptism taught in the New Testament is accomplished by: (a) sprinkling; (b) pouring; (c) immersion.
8. To be united in faith it is necessary for us to: (a) ignore our differences; (b) duplicate the pattern of the early church; (c) promote denominational co-operation.
9. An individual may promote the cause of unity by: taking part in denominational activities; (b) separating himself from other Christians; (c) worshipping with a congregation of undenominational Christians.

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## Lesson 25

### Answers

These lessons are based on the King James Version, so if you are using another translation the words employed may vary slightly. Sometimes an alternative answer is possible. The following is a useful guide.

Section 1 – (Order not important)

Ignorance of God's word

A tendency to follow men rather than God

The doctrines of men

Human creeds and confessions of faith

Denominational names

Denominational organisations

Section 2 – God, Lord, man, body, Spirit, body, Spirit, member.

Section 3 – 1. (c)

2. (a)

3. (b)

4. (c)

5. (b)

6. (a)

7. (c)

8. (b)

9. (c)

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