

## **UNITY: Modern Stumbling Block**

### *Which comes first, unity or truth?*

By Curtis Dickinson

“To this end have I been born and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth hears my voice” (John 18:37).

Take another look at this scripture. It contains two facts: (1) Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. All that He ever was, said and did in this world focused upon the truth; truth that God desired men to know. His virgin birth, His sinless life, His knowledge of God and men, and finally his vicarious death and bodily resurrection—all this reveals to the minds of men the truth of God and His eternal purpose. (2) Everyone that accepts this truth is within the call of Jesus. To reject the truth is also to reject Christ.

Jesus said that worship of God must be “in truth.” A moment's consideration convinces us that a relationship with God can not be established on a false basis.

Jesus pointed out that His own relationship with the Father, as man to God, was centered in the fact that he “knew Him,” “O righteous Father,” He prayed, “The world knew Thee not, but I knew Thee.” John 17:25. He prayed for His followers, “that they may be one even as we are” (John 17:11).

The relationship between the Heavenly Father and the Son, as a human, is one in which the truth is held as an example of all unity. “He that sent me is true, and the things which I heard from Him, these speak I unto the world.” “I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:6, 8). Jesus then set this forth as the example for all unity with God: “If ye abide in my word, then are ye truly my disciples; and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”

God, being true, is not united with men on the basis of error. Nor can men, who are united with God in truth, be united with one another through error. Thus truth and unity go hand in hand, with truth the basis upon which unity is established.

But what do we find in the modern attempt at unity? It is a unity which rejects an examination of revealed truth for fear that such an examination might show differences that would divide! The plea for unity has thus become a stumbling block to the truth.

God in His Word sets forth certain truths that must be accepted before one can be in harmony with Him. He does not demand that we know all things terrestrial and celestial, all prophecy and history, nor that we be agreed on methods nor matters of personal conscience. But He does insist that we know and accept the truth regarding the good news, the gospel. The scriptures repeatedly explain the truth about Christ's death, what happened there, why, and the benefits that are ours from it. Men cannot hold opposing ideas of Christ's sacrifice and yet be united. The other arm of the “good news” the resurrection, is clearly defined by the apostles. This gospel, the death and resurrection of

Jesus Christ, includes the truth essential to bring man into a saving relationship with God. Through it we see God's purpose and furthermore we become united with all others of the same purpose.

But unity evades us here. Within the framework of the Christian Church there are many opposing attitudes toward Christ's death, His resurrection and the resurrection of believers. Yet an examination of these vital issues is perpetually thrust aside, from fear that "division" will arise if we probe for the truth.

) This attitude is summed up in a recent statement of a Correspondent who, when confronted with the subject of the gospel, answered, in effect, "This is probably the truth, but to pursue it might cause division in our churches. Thus the desire for unity barred the way to the truth.

Jesus said to the united religion of His day, "ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth. . . . Because I say the truth ye believe me not. If I say truth why do ye not believe me?" (John 8:40, 45-46). Had they accepted the truth they would have been united with Christ, but this would have broken up the existing organization.

Modern man demands at least the **appearance of unity**. Therefore his differences over the truth of the gospel are thrust into the background and shut off from view to keep from causing any friction among the "united." Unity becomes the stumbling block to truth.

This may very well account for much of the trouble within and between churches, the lack of conviction, commitment and consecration, the frustration of the ministry and the general flabby texture of modern church membership. Even the so-called unity, which is maintained at the cost of the truth, is empty and powerless, because (1) without a true basic concept of the Gospel no one is in unity with God and (2) the basis of any fellowship is not in mere organic togetherness, but in unity of thought and faith, "of one mind and one accord."

We need to reverse the process of working toward unity. The command is not to "seek" unity, but to seek the truth. When and wherever we arrive at it unity will be the result. And if we arrive at the very foundational truth regarding the Good News, we will have unity that is deep and abiding. Of course not everyone wants the truth and many will cling to UN security of their established fellowship rather than believe the truth. But shall we continually dodge the issue and hide the truth that a false "united front" might prevail?

Consider Paul's words: "But unto them that are factious and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, shall be wrath and indignation" (Rom. 2:8). Factions are created by refusing the truth.

Paul openly rebuked Peter because he "walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:14). When Peter accepted the truth of the gospel, unity was restored. Of course this meant the destruction of the union Peter had experienced with his erring

Jewish friends. But he did not allow this imitation unity to stand between him and the truth of the gospel. Are we today afraid to examine the truth of the gospel for fear it will draw us out of our little fold?

Viewing our present situation we see a paradox: where men continually seek unity, they find only further contradiction and division; but where they humbly pursue truth, they discover each other in harmonious fellowship. **Seek truth and you find it with unity thrown in; seek unity and find neither.**

Let us not fear the truth, for the Master said that it “will make you free.” Let our fellowship be as John put it: “fellow workers for the truth” (3 John 8).

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