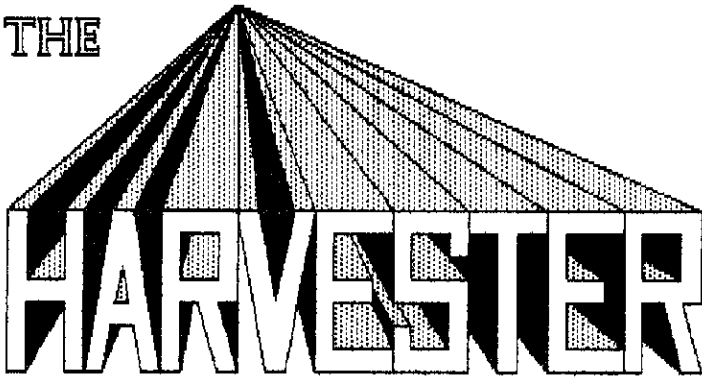


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"The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." (Luke 10:2)

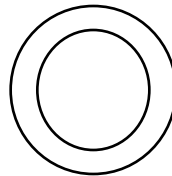
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CHURCH UNITY

That God desires unity among his saints is so clear in scripture as to hardly be questioned (John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 1:10; 1 Cor. 3:3). However, Christendom is terribly divided and fractured, even among those preaching "unity based on the scriptures alone."

Why the division? There may be many reasons. However, we might think that having the Bible as a common basis would be sufficient to establish unity among



its adherents. Perhaps it would be if we all had perfect understanding and application of the scriptures. However, such is not the case.

Normal Differences in the Body of Christ

The scriptures themselves recognize different levels of spiritual maturity and growth: "*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby*" (1 Pet. 2:2); "*For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe*" (Heb. 5:13). This, of course, implies the body of Christ is inherently diverse in its doctrinal beliefs and convictions. One simply cannot expect a "babe in Christ" to hold the same convictions as a mature Christian. Neither could we exclude the babes because they do not hold all the same convictions as the mature Christians. This suggests that biblical unity can and must exist in spite of some differences.

Religious Arrogance

Some conclude that their own understanding is always the correct one. Thus, anyone disagreeing with them is automatically wrong. The Bible warns against this spirit of arrogance, which has caused much strife in the church. "*Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth. And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*" (1 Cor. 8:1,2) See also Prov. 3:7; Prov. 26:12; Isa. 5:21; and Rom. 12:16. The warning

also suggests that true biblical unity can exist in spite of our imperfect knowledge of God's will.

Doctrinal Differences

Clearly, there are some differences of belief that require our severance of association with those who differ. *"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* (Rom. 16:17) Also refer to 1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Thes. 3:6; and 1 Tim. 6:5. However, just as clearly, there are some differences that require unity despite the differences such as described in Rom. 14:1-13. Note that these differences were significant doctrinal issues of that era probably relating to the keeping of the Jewish Law (Rom. 14:1-13; Gal. 4:10, 21). The simple conclusion is that even certain doctrinal differences can exist in the body. In that same context, the apostle Paul relates that the basis for unity is to *"receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God"* (Rom. 15:7), and imposes discipline upon those who would cause division over such matters. *Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them."* (Rom. 16:17).

Christian Relationships

Christian relationships must be based on mercy, kindness, humility, meekness, and love. *"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness,*

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Ray McManus
 141 County Road 474
 Woodland, AL 36280
 Phone: (256) 449-9221

longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." (Col. 3:12-14) This would leave no room for arrogance or self-seeking as exhibited by Diotrephes who would not receive his brothers in Christ due to his love for preeminence in the church (3 John 1:9).

Mistreating Our Brother (Warning)

Numerous warnings against mistreating or speaking evil against our brother can be found in the scriptures. "*Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door.*" (Jas. 5:9) "*Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.*" (Jas. 4:11) "*But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever*

shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt. 5:22) "And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea." (Mark 9:42) These verse indicate we could thereby be condemned, even stating it would be better that a millstone were hung about our necks and cast into the sea.

We must therefore be very careful to avoid unjust accusing one another of heresy, unfaithfulness, or hypocrisy simply because we disagree on disputable issues. Are we so certain of our own reasoning on such issues that we would risk our eternal lives for it?

MIKE PANNELL
PO Box 196
Coleman, OK 73432

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. Who was the man that God used to restore Paul's sight in Damascus?
2. Since the Levites were only given towns, where were they to have pasturelands?
3. In what form did God come to Moses in order for the people to hear him speaking with Moses?

4. Whose example should husbands copy in loving their wives?

5. In accord with Isaiah's prophecy, who will see the Lord's banner (ensign) when it is raised, and hear the trumpet when it blows?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. Who defended Saul in Jerusalem after his conversion? BARNABAS (Acts 9:27)

2. How long did the Plague of Darkness sent by God remain in the land of Egypt? THREE DAYS (Exo. 10:22)

3. Why did the Lord send serpents to plague the Israelites? BECAUSE THEY COMPLAINED (Num. 21:5,6)

4. If one speaks evil of a fellow Christian, what is he also speaking evil of? THE LAW (Jas. 4:11)

5. How many strings does the harp/lyre have that David plays to sing praises to God? TEN (Psa. 144:9)

CITIZENS OF HEAVEN

The Hebrew writer states that the Patriarchs considered themselves strangers and pilgrims on the earth and were seeking a homeland. He writes in Heb. 11:16, *"But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore*

God is not ashamed to be called their God". Paul writes in Phil. 3:20, "For our citizenship is in heaven". Our outlook goes beyond this world to the hopeful expectation of the Saviour who will come from heaven. The Lord Jesus Christ referring to heaven as a country emphasizes one's citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. Having entered the Redeemer's Kingdom here on earth (as we read in Col. 1:13), the Christian if he is faithful to the end will be privileged to enter the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:11).

The Christian is not truly at home in this world since Satan is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:1; John 12:31; 14:30). Someday by God's grace the redeemed will go to their own country where God is King. Joyfully we sing in anticipation, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's opened door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore."

A second description of heaven is as a city. The idea of a city of God blessed by His presence and existing forever goes back to the Patriarchal Period when God began to prepare a people for Himself. Abraham is said to have "*looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (Heb. 11:10). Hebrews 11:16 states that God "*hath prepared for them a city*". The Psalmist echoes this hope when he wrote Psa. 46:4-5, "*There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy*

(continued next page)

