

FEBRUARY 7, 2021

RED OAK CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE GUIDELINE

Psalms 31:3

UNITY AND DIVERSITY

What is unity? We can think of it like this - two things becoming one. We have a great example of unity in Matthew, *And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?* (Matthew 19:4-5) Webster defines it as, “A condition of harmony (accord), continuity without deviation or change (as in purpose action), the quality or state of being made one.”

The Bible actually only uses the word “unity” a few times, but it becomes very obvious to us when studying it that the unity theme is woven throughout both the old and new testaments. We will now review these few scriptures and let the Bible show us how God feels about unity. Then we will attempt to show how men often distort, confuse and abuse this great Bible doctrine. The first passages is found in Psalms, *Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, That ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: That went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: For there the LORD commanded the blessing, Even life for evermore.* (Psalm 133:1-3) In this passage we learn that it is a good and pleasant thing to be together with brethren in unity. Also, notice if you will, the benefits that David shares with us concerning unity. Not only is it good and pleasant, but it is likened unto the Levitical priests being anointed with precious ointment which brought forth the tremendous blessings of Jehovah God. Next, we turn to John’s narrative and learn the key to understanding what true Christian unity with God is and how it is to be obtained. In John 17 Jesus offers a prayer on the behalf of the apostles as they are about to embark upon their great gospel mission. In this beautiful prayer it is revealed that unity is enjoyed only when cer-

avored as a ripped garment. How was this schism coming about? Some were saying I am of Paul, some of Apollos, some of Cephas and some of Christ. Paul makes it clear these men had not been crucified in order to qualify to be followed in such a fashion. Even those invoking the name of Christ were doing it out of a haughty, self-serving party spirit which was of course just as sinful as following after a man!

Paul asked what I believe to be a rhetorical question, “Is Christ divided?” Christ had been divided! Paul had pointed out that such discord violates a Christian’s duty in his service and whole heart dedication to Christ. Keep in mind that although we do not have a religious sectarian body here to discuss (it involved Christians) we do have an insight as to how, in a few hundred years, false doctrines would start to develop and men would begin to fall away, starting man-made religions totally foreign to the New Testament teaching on true biblical unity. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* (Matthew 7:21-23)

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called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing 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. (Ephesians 4:1-6) The words of Paul here echo the words of our Lord's prayer in John 17!

How many churches do we read of in the New Testament? Only one. Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church. (Colossians 1:24) How many ways do we find in the New Testament to become a Christian? Only one. (Hear, Romans 10:14 Believe, Romans 10:17, James 2:24, Repent, Luke 13:3, Confess, Romans 10:10, Be baptized, Romans 6:3-4, Acts 2:38) This may come as a bit of a shock to some who are reading this, but we challenge anyone to find any church other than the church of Christ- there are no other churches mentioned in the Bible! We recently held an evangelistic effort here in Manchester with this advertising promotion; "There are over four thousand different religions in the world. Have you ever wondered about where all these institutions came from and what their historical significance is? An even more important question is whether these organizations have a scriptural right to exist at all?" You may be wondering this very thing as you are reading this article. Especially since you now know there are no denominations to be found in the Bible. We have some information in the scriptures that indicate how all these varying doctrines made their way into the religious arena. It is found in the first letter written to the church at Corinth. Again, Paul starts his letter with a normal greeting and then he writes this; Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) The word translated "divisions" here is also translated "schism" in 1 Corinthians 12:25. It means to rip, split, tear, break open, or rent. Paul was warning the church at Corinth that they were in danger of becoming ill-

tain things are in place. In verses 1-6 Jesus says he made known God's name to the men that had been given to serve, and they had been kept or guarded by Christ, and they had kept God's word. So, two principles we learn- they had to belong to God, or be in God's good graces, and they had to conform to his word (vs 6). Secondly, we learn from this text that they had to come out of the world, and that is accomplished by being sanctified through the truth of God (vs 17). It is then, and only then, they could enjoy unity or be one with God. You may be saying; "ok you have shown what unity meant for them but what does that have to do with me?" Notice please; Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. (John 17:20-23) You see, we have God's grace exemplified here in that he has provided us instructions through inspiration on how to enjoy unity and be in fellowship and harmony with him.

How is it that one today can truly know that they are in harmony with the Bible and are enjoying good and pleasant unity with God and brethren? As we continue to study the scripture we turn to the book of Acts and here we take up the narrative of Jesus ascending back to the Father as he had promised. The apostles were standing by with amazement and were reminded that Christ had made this promise earlier. (vs 9-11) Then, shortly after, we find Peter and the apostles preaching the first gospel message to several thousand. Out of that crowd about three thousand or so were baptized for the remission of their sins and the Lord added them to his church. (Acts 2) From this point on you have congregations established in several regions due to the great evangelistic efforts made by the apostles and new converts alike. Having explained in very brief detail how the Lord's church began, we now turn to an epistle written to the church at Ephesus. In this great letter Paul explains, among other things, what unity in the faith means. Please keep in mind, when you are reading these letters written to congregations you are doing exactly that, reading a letter written to baptized Christians, or as one good brother says; "reading their mail". Notice please; I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are