

Lesson Ten: Bible-Based Unity

All Christians worship the same God and read from the same book, the Bible. So why are there so many different kinds of Christians and churches? Why is the Christian world so divided?

Jesus prayed for the unity of all who believed in him. John 17:20-21

Division in the body of Christ is condemned by the Apostle Paul. I Corinthians 1:10-17

The Seven “Ones” of Christianity. Ephesians 4:3-6

There are two approaches to unity: The first is a kind of negotiation until all the parties at the table find common ground. The second is Bible-based unity where everyone at the table yields to the authority of the Bible.

When Jesus prayed for unity he was not praying for a negotiated, compromise type unity. He was praying for a unity based on His Word.

SOME STEPS TOWARD BIBLE-BASED UNITY:

- 1 Accept the New Testament as the only valid covenant between God and man.
- 2 No scripture is to be interpreted in isolation. Scripture interprets scripture. One scripture does not cancel out another scripture. Scriptures are to be harmonized. Matthew 4:1-11
- 3 Do not add to or take away from scripture. Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; Revelation 22:18-19
- 4 Teach and practice only what can be established with scripture.
- 5 Allow freedom in areas where scripture has not spoken and where methods have not been determined by scripture. I Corinthians 9:19-23
- 6 Do not bind first-century culture on 21st century Christians/churches.
- 7 Do not bind manmade traditions on Christians and churches. Matthew 15:1-3

Most conservative Christians and churches would accept in theory the steps toward Bible-based unity given above. Differences persist because some groups apply these steps more completely than others.

THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

In the early 1800's in America some religious leaders grew very concerned about the divisions which existed in the Christian church. They promoted the steps toward Bible-based unity given above. But more importantly they noted that the churches were divided not over things the Bible said, but over things where the Bible was silent. They believed this was the key to restoring unity among Christians. The slogan was **SPEAK WHERE THE BIBLE SPEAKS AND REMAIN SILENT WHERE THE BIBLE IS SILENT**. Most Christian churches believed that the silence of the scripture was permission to do whatever seemed right. Restoration leaders pointed out that sometimes silence is God's way of saying, “No.”

SOMETIMES SILENCE MEANS PERMISSION

The Great Commission **Mark 16:15-16**

How shall we go into all the world?

The Assembly on the First Day of the Week **Hebrews 10:25**

Where shall we meet? What time? How long?

SOMETIMES SILENCE MEANS NO—DON'T DO IT

There are several places in the Old and New Testament where God's silence about something meant NO—don't do it.

Nadab and Abihu offering unauthorized or strange fire before the Lord **Leviticus 10:1-2**

On what basis was the fire prohibited by God?

Jesus' interpretation of **Leviticus 24:5-9** as expressed in **Matthew 12:1-8**.

Why was it unlawful for David and his men to eat the showbread?

Did God specifically prohibit families other than Aaron's from eating the bread?

The writer of Hebrews in **Hebrews 7:12-14**.

How did Israel know that it was wrong for tribes other than Levi to serve in the Tabernacle?

The case of David moving the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem in **I Chronicles 13**.

He moved the ark by means of an ox cart and two oxen using men not of the tribe of Levi.

God had already spoken in the Law (**Exodus 25:10-15**) that the ark should be moved by means of poles inserted through rings at the corners of the ark of the covenant and carried on the shoulders of Levites (**Numbers 4:15-20**).. Moving the ark by ox cart cost Uzza his life.

In **I Chronicles 15:12-15** David acknowledges his mistake and corrects it.

Why was the oxcart method wrong?

THIS TYPE OF REASONING IS COMMON IN MODERN TIMES

We understand how a recipe or cookbook works.

We understand the concept of a constitution which governs the officers of an organization.

We understand how a doctor's prescription works.

By stating what is right or approved all other options are ruled out.

If God says East—North, South, and West are automatically ruled out.

If God says Red—blue, green, yellow, orange, brown, gray, etc. are ruled out.

If God says Oak—maple, hickory, gum, walnut, sycamore, etc are ruled out.

APPLYING THIS TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

If God indicates "the first day of the week"—then Monday, Tuesday, etc are ruled out

If God indicates "immersion"—then pouring, sprinkling, etc. are ruled out.

If God indicates "elders in every church"—then other forms of leadership are ruled out.

If God indicates "unleavened bread and fruit of the vine"—then other drinks and foods are ruled out.

If God indicates "singing"—instruments are ruled out..

If God indicates "faith, repentance, confession, baptism"—then confirmation, sinners prayer, etc are ruled out

UNITY BASED ON WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT SAYS IS POSSIBLE IF THIS PRINCIPLE IS OBSERVED.