

# Christians Unite!

*“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”* (Eph 4:3). More and more today, Christians are calling on others to unite with them in some endeavor. Some more recent calls would be the Million Man March, or the abortion cause, or Promise Keepers, or some ecumenical movement encompassing Protestants and Catholics. We are confronted with many decisions, to unite with this group or that group. What are we to do? Should we just blindly trust anyone who goes by the name Christian? The Bible does exhort us to do our best to keep unity with other believers. What I want to explore is how we may begin to have unity with other believers and when not to unite.

First, we should point out that we can join no organization that contradicts the very principles for which we claim to live and die. We are called to have fellowship with other believers. *“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and purpose.”* (Phil 2:1, 2). If we are to unite, we cannot leave our principles or doctrinal tenants at home. To be like-minded means we believe the same thing, and we have the same purpose. Paul is not saying we can just choose any purpose and unite on it. We must unite on what God has ordained. *“Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”* (Jude 3). Jude had this concern on his heart even in the first century. Here we are in the 20th century and it is forgotten. This is a warning to those who are walking in unity through their common salvation. They had unity of Spirit, but not at the expense of their beliefs. Salvation was the tie that bound them together. Notice Jude’s words *“salvation we share,”* this is the foundation of agreement, the harmony with which we unite together. Then we are urged to contend for the faith, that is, the doctrines, or the body of truth that was *once for all* given to the saints.

Here we are called to contend, to fight, to battle for these doctrines that made us who we are. Here there can be NO compromise. Our making every effort to keep unity is with people who maintain these truths, *not* with those who reject them. This cannot be said of the many groups calling all to unite without being like-minded about the body of truth or the faith. Usually they are calling for unity, but for some cause they consider a priority, such as abortion, or racial harmony, animal rights, etc. If we unite with others based on causes we find attractive, right or wrong, we could be uniting with those who are spiritually dead. Now, they don’t need to save the spotted owl, they need salvation!

The Bible poses a question, *“Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?”* (Amos 3:3). No, they do not. God desires fellowship with us, now *that* is something to think about. The eternal God, Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Sovereign

of the universe wants to unite in close and intimate fellowship with us! I am beginning to understand what the Psalmist meant when he said “*what is man that you are mindful of him.*” Although God wants unity in fellowship, He will not compromise His perfect standards, even an inch! Our fellowship with God is dependent on His provisions to sustain that fellowship and our willingness to adhere to the rules He has set. Any deviation and we are walking in darkness (see 1John 1:1-9). Two cannot walk together if where they are going, and how to get there, is not agreed upon.

Over the years I have listened to many Pastors and Evangelists give the gospel message. Many have had great audiences with all attention focused on their every word, and have failed at the very heart of the matter- giving the gospel. Some of today’s Evangelists can pack large stadiums with the unsaved and still not give the message of salvation clearly. There are many doctrines in the Bible that take some time to comprehend and many take different interpretations. To try and unite on those doctrines is tough if first there is no harmony on the simple gospel. Certainly Satan is behind this confusion of the clear message in the Bible. Why do we hear these great discourses about Christian life, morality, righteousness and not given a clear message of salvation? Often the *result* is emphasized and not the means of salvation. At the end of the message, the spiritually dead are told, all they have to do is to receive Christ, or to be born again, or to repent of their sins or ask for forgiveness of their sins. In my opinion this is not clear and is not what the Bible says to do *for* salvation. My questions to them are, how do you receive Christ, or be born again, or what does it mean to repent of sins, or ask forgiveness? These are all areas where Satan has caused great confusion and division in the body. If you do not believe this, just ask ten Christians their view on how to be saved.

This unity God urges upon us is valuable. God uses it to present a united front to the world of unbelievers. If Christians cannot even agree on what is the way of salvation, how will unbelievers view this? “*I appeal to you brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought*” (1Cor 1:10). God uses this unity and love that we share for one another to show the world that there is a difference between light and darkness, between those who are dead and those who are alive to God. Many trivialize the way of salvation as if it were so general and broad, then, their words are also general and broad. Here is where we must be careful, for the broad way leads to destruction. I can agree with someone about the desire for the lost to be saved, but just as important, we must agree on the way of salvation.

The means of salvation is through faith alone (no works at all) in the Lord Jesus Christ alone (not in anything or anyone else). Drop all the cute and clever phrases man has come up with and have come to depend on, simply cling to what the Bible says and you will not be deceived. The gospel of salvation has three things that need emphasis: **1.** What Adam did. Adam made a decision to sin and the whole human race became sinners. We are not sinners because we are especially bad, but that is our nature by birth in the family of Adam (see Rom 5:12-21). Spiritual death and the sin nature rule over all in Adam whether they know it or not. **2.** What Christ did. The work of salvation is

bringing a lost race back to God, called reconciliation; how that was accomplished is by Christ Himself being a sacrifice for all sins, substituting Himself for the sinner and receiving the wrath of God instead of us, this is called redemption; Christ accomplished this and God the Father resurrected Him after three days showing His approval and satisfaction of the work of Christ, living a sinless life, and suffering on the cross. This is called propitiation; 3. What we do. This is the human side, not what God has done but what we must do. We must have faith, we must believe God. That requires no works but simply dependence on God and what He has done already. If we bring works, we don't have faith, for faith is looking away from ourselves to the work of Christ. The key word is "faith" the noun, and "believe" in its verb form. This is the ONLY requirement on the human side (see John 3:15-18; 36; 5:24; 6:28, 29; 20:31; Acts 16:31; Rom 1:16; 3:22-28; Eph 2:8, 9; 2Tim 1:9-11; Titus 3:5). These are just some of the passages used for salvation and our response to it. Let us be clear and let us be exact about this, for the enemy seeks to divide and destroy our unity on these core issues.

Instead of flowing sermons on morality, why not take time to explain in detail the doctrines of salvation. This is the very thing that the unsaved need to understand and believe. Let that be our emphasis, and let us be relentless in our presentation of these doctrines. Once we hear that familiar and sweet theme of grace, *that* is our rallying call of unity. Once we lift the thought of our Lord Jesus Christ, what He accomplished, and what it means, *that* causes me to feel at home and have a sense of unity with other believers. When I hear the doctrines of grace made prominent by others who hold these precious pearls, those who are earnestly contending for the priceless faith once for all entrusted to us, then we can truly know that *they* are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Truly we can sing joyfully and rejoice in God our Savior and Lord when we are assured of these truths we mutually hold and esteem. When we hear the doctrines of grace maligned, and the way of salvation obscured, we are uncertain and withdraw. Let us have unity together, but *not* at the expense of truth. There is room for disagreement in the body of Christ, but certainly not about the foundational doctrines we hold.

Of course I realize not everything is spelled out here in detail about how to have unity. Remember this was only to establish a basis for unity. Hopefully that goal was accomplished. I would like to close with the words of our Lord: "*A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother'.*" (Mark 3:32-35). And, "*Then they asked him, what must we do to do the works God requires? Jesus answered, the work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.*" (John 6:28, 29).

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