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The Platform of Christian Unity

By Dillard Thurman

The whole of Christendom has been beset with a plague of disunity, divisions, partyism and strife! Almost innumerable sects have sprung up; they have split, and other factions have grown. Countless "brands" of churches have surfaced, each with its own peculiar tenets of faith, and particular creeds and doctrines. Our Lord foresaw this confusion and strife, and in His prayer for His disciples, He asked the Father: "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." (John 17:20-21). He wanted all who believed on Him through the apostles' word to stand united, "that the world may believe." Division and discord plant doubts and unbelief! But ecumenical councils have bogged down in the sloughs of partyism, sectarianism and selfish ambition, fostered by ecclesiasts who dote on their coveted clergy positions! Sectarian creeds and dogmas, dearly beloved by some, are rejected by others! Churches to which some are joined are offensive to others! While they plead for peace, they reject the words of the Prince of Peace!

The Lord's Platform For Unity!

A united church can be realized only by discarding human creeds and doctrines of men, and listening to God's word: "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain who build it." (Psalms 127:1). While men yearn for unity, it is high time God's plea for unity be heeded! Paul wrote the saints: "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 in the same judgment." (I Corinthians 1:10). That is the picture of unity the Lord wants shown to the world! Church councils will fail, but God's plan, revealed in Ephesians 4:1-6 will work! That platform for unity has seven unique, distinct planks, each being absolutely essential! Study them!

1. One Body - Unity of Organization!

By accepting this truth, that there is only one spiritual body, we are assured of unity of organization. The Bible emphatically teaches there is just one body! It states that God "Gave him [Christ] to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23). There is just **One** body; **One** Head; **One** church! But check on this again: "And he is the head of the body, the church." (Colossians 1:18). If you have walked the streets of Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth or Rome, you would have found just **One** body, the church! To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote: "But now are they many members, yet but one body." (I Corinthians 12:20). To spell it out fully, he added: "Now are ye the body of Christ, and members in particular." (verse 27). Jesus had promised, "I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18). He did not promise to build many churches — just one! He also purchased only one church with His blood (Acts 20:28); and thus gave Himself for that one church (Ephesians 5:25). Men have built many churches and we have many religious bodies: but there is only one body approved of God: "Even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body." (Ephesians 5:23). Christ will save His church: who will save those men have built?

2. One Spirit - Unity of Life!

John wrote: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 5:1). But Paul was speaking of the **one** Spirit that God has sent forth to reveal His will and serve His cause. Just as there is one body, so there is **one** Spirit to motivate that body! Peter declared "And we are witnesses of these things; and so also is the Holy Spirit, whom God hath given to them that obey him." (Acts 5:32). This is that which Peter had promised in Acts 2:38; an indwelling of the Spirit! Paul wrote, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body . . . and

have been all made to drink into one Spirit." (I Corinthians 12:13). When one comes into the family of God, he receives this one Spirit: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Galatians 4:6). The Spirit is given every child of God without exception: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." (Romans 8:9). Lives are directed by the Spirit through the word He reveals to us. "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh." "But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." (Galatians 5:16, 18). "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Romans 8:14). Our lives will be in harmony with all others in the body of Christ while we are "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). Thus the one spirit promotes peace and unifies us in that one life in Christ!

3. One Hope - Unity of Purpose

One central hope unites and binds the people of God. "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." (Phil. 3:20-21). Thus the eyes of all saints look "For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." (Colossians 1:5). Despite this, one religious group denies that we can even get to heaven for the fulfillment of this hope; though they claim to be "Witnesses"! But read what awaits all "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil." (Hebrews 6:19-20). The glorious thought of being with Christ Jesus our Lord in that home of the soul gives purpose and aim for our lives! This asperation of the soul transcends death and the grave, and enlivens every thought of entering into those mansions above! As Paul so aptly said, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." (I Corinthians 15:19). We would faint and fail if we had no hope in that which is beyond death; but with hope we will persevere! "For we are saved by hope:

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THE PLATFORM OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

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but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Romans 8:24-25). That one thought solidifies the hopes of all God's people, and gives purpose and direction to our lives!

4. One Lord - Unity of Authority

Accepting Jesus Christ as Lord unites all saints under one authority! Before He parted from His disciples, Jesus assured them: "All power [AUTHORITY] has been given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18). He did not claim **SOME** authority or power! He said **ALL!** His absolute and complete authority must be accepted, respected and obeyed! There is none to rival Him! He stands as Lord of lords, and King of kings! Who besides the Christ could say, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father"? (Luke 10:22). In proclaiming Him for the first time as the risen Lord, Peter said, "That God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ." (Acts 2:36). To this Paul stated that God "hath put all things under his feet." (I Corinthians 15:27). Jesus said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). His absolute authority allows no room for synods, councils or conferences! Men shall not legislate on matters which He controls! His absolute rule of power will continue to the end: "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom of God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy

that shall be destroyed is death." (I Corinthians 15:24-26). Our acceptance of Jesus Christ as the **one Lord** is the basis for unity in all religious matters. Unity is assured when we return to a "Thus saith the Lord."

5. One Faith - Unity of Doctrine

Many times we hear the question, "What is his faith?" They really want to know what is his religious affiliation, or the church to which he belongs. But the question betrays ignorance, for Paul said there is **one** body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism and God! You could as well ask what Lord he accepts, or what God he worships, as to ask what faith he holds! In that same chapter, Paul said, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith." (Ephesians 4:13). He speaks of the faith as a unit; and is not to be slashed, haggled and decimated. You must accept it all as given, or you may as well reject it all! Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4). Jude wrote that the saints "should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints." (Jude 3). The unity of the faith is beautifully portrayed in these words: "Only let your conversation be as cometh the gospel of Christ; that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand stedfast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." (Phil. 1:27). Contending for that one faith insures the purity of the gospel proclamation, and the holy lives of the Christians. Paul warns against any corruption of it: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." (Galatians 1:8). There can be unity of doctrine only when there is **one** faith!

6. One Baptism - Unity of Induction

The New Testament speaks of the baptism of John, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the baptism of fire, and the baptism of Christ's commission. John's baptism passed with him; Holy Spirit baptism was for the apostles only; and the baptism of fire will be the punishment of the wicked in the last day. This means only the baptism of Christ's commission was in effect when Paul stated, Harmony is restored when we accept the one baptism in this platform for unity! Jesus taught: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." (Mark 16:16). There was unity on Pentecost when Peter told men: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins." (Acts 2:38). "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized," with that one baptism, "And they continued stedfastly

in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." (verses 41-42). It was this one baptism Peter referred to in Acts 10:48: "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." It was still this one baptism Ananias commanded of Saul of Tarsus: "And now, why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." (Acts 22:16). This one baptism changed their state and relationship, and made for unity! "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:26-28). Thus unity is attained through this one baptism! "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body." (I Corinthians 12:13). In this verse, Paul underlines the one Spirit, one baptism, and one body! This one baptism brings us into Christ for unity! (Romans 6:3-4; II Corinthians 5:17). Unity of induction is achieved in that all enter into Christ in the same way!

7. One God - Unity of Worship

In Christ, all worshippers are united, in that all worship is directed to "one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." The very first of the Ten Commandments given to Israel was: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Exodus 20:3). It was emphatically declared: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). The downfall of Israel in many of their generations is that they turned to other gods, and reaped the wrath of God for their folly! When He was tempted in the wilderness, Jesus answered the tempter: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." (Matthew 4:10). Nothing unifies a people more than having the same object of their worship, adoration and praise! The whole of God's book teaches us to ascribe our worship to God alone! When John had received the revelation on Patmos, he wrote: "And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then said he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren and prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God." (Revelation 22:8-9). That sums it all up: Worship God!

If the seven planks are securely in place in God's platform for Christian unity, then peace and harmony will reign among believers in God! But this demands that we accept and teach: **One Body** for

unity of organization; **One Spirit** for unity of life; **One Hope** for unity of purpose; **One Lord** for unity of authority; **One Faith** for unity of doctrine; **One Baptism** for unity of induction; and **One God** for unity of worship. With these established, where can there be factions and divisions?

How Does One Get Into Christ?

By Richard England

One last lesson showed the necessity of being "in Christ". There being no salvation outside of Him, surely we all want to know how to get into Him.

God has revealed the wonderful message of Jesus Christ. This gospel is to be preached to "every creature" (Mark 16:15). To not believe this report is to be damned (Mark 16:17). To those who believe it, it is the power of God unto Salvation (Romans 1:16). Occasionally there are those who do not understand that the word faith, which is a noun, may refer to the single act of believing or ALSO be used as a synecdoche referring to the entire system of Christianity as in Jude 3 and Galatians 3:23. With this misunderstanding, they read a passage which connects faith or belief to salvation and think they have found the entire revelation of God about salvation and say that we are saved by, or get into Christ by "faith only." Such is not the teaching of the Bible.

Without repentance we will perish (Luke 13:3). God has commanded all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Repentance is no unimportant matter. It is "unto life" (Acts 11:18). This being true, "faith only" is not a wholesome doctrine. It falls short of what God requires of man.

"With the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). If we do not confess Jesus before men, He will not confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32, 33).

In doing these things, or any other commands of the gospel, we are not performing works which will merit, or cause God to owe salvation to us. If it were possible for a law of performance of duty to provide eternal life for man, it would be the law God gave to Israel in the Old Testament (Galatians 3:21). But, in that the law could not do this, it was necessary for the faith to be revealed in Christ.

All who are children of God are such "by faith." Where? IN CHRIST JESUS (Galatians 3:26). But when they heard the "faith" and believed it and determined to live better, were they already IN CHRIST by virtue of having heard, believed and repented? No. When they had progressed this far, THEN they got INTO CHRIST, or PUT HIM ON, by baptism (Galatians 3:27). Read the text from your own Bible and see that that is exactly what it says.

Hearing, believing, repenting, confessing and being baptized are all necessary to being saved or getting into Christ. In order for a thing to be used as a figure of speech where a part stands for the whole, it must of necessity be a part of the whole. If hearing were no part of life, John 5:25 could not have been written. If faith were no part of justification, Romans 5:1 would be wrong. If repentance were unnecessary, Acts 11:18 would be inaccurate. If confession had nothing to do with being in God, I John 4:15 would be meaningless. If baptism were not essential to being saved, I Peter 3:21 would show that the apostle Peter didn't understand the gospel. But, all these things are commands which must be obeyed in order to get INTO CHRIST. Usually, the only part of this with which people would disagree would be baptism. Yet, baptism is the very thing said to put us INTO CHRIST.

All who have obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ are IN Christ. All who have not obeyed the gospel will be the recipients of the vengeance of God (II Thessalonians 1:8). Are you INSIDE or OUTSIDE of Jesus Christ?

Three Dispensations of Time

By Ernest Loomis

A valuable asset in rightly dividing, thus understanding the Bible, is a knowledge of the three divisions of history or dispensations of time since creation. There is a distinction to be made between each dispensation and a distinct purpose for each. The three periods are The Patriarchal, the Jewish or Mosaical and the Christian.

The Patriarchal was from creation to the cross of Christ, about 2,500 years to the giving of the law of Moses but the Gentiles continued under this system to the cross. This was a family or tribal system of law and worship, God speaking

His wishes to the head of the family. Animal sacrifices were offered as worship (Genesis 4:4; Hebrews 11:4), but there was no certain day set aside for worship as the sabbath was not given to the people until given to the children of Israel after they had been delivered from Egyptian bondage (Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 13:15). The gospel was preached in promise or prophecy in this period (Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:3), and this dispensation ended at the cross (Ephesians 2:11-17).

The Jewish or Mosaical dispensation began at the giving of the law of Moses, being added because of transgressions (Galatians 3:19), and lasted to the cross, which was about 1,500 years. Moses was the lawgiver (John 1:17); it was a national system of law and worship, being given only to the children of Israel (Deut. 5:2-3); animal sacrifices were offered under this law and instructions are given for the various offerings in the first nine chapters of Leviticus; the sabbath was given to the children of Israel for them to observe (Exodus 20:8, 31:16-17); and the gospel was spoken of by the prophets (Isaiah 2:2-3, 9:6-7; Jeremiah 31:31-34) and fulfilled in the New Testament (Acts 2; Hebrews 8:8-13). This law was fulfilled by Christ (Matthew 5:17), nailed to the cross of Christ and taken out of the way (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9) because the offerings under it could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:1-4).

The Christian age or dispensation began at the cross of Christ and will continue until the end of time. Jesus is the lawgiver (John 1:17) and it is a universal or international system of spiritual law and worship (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 10:34-35). Animal sacrifices are no longer offered for Jesus gave Himself a sacrifice for all (Hebrews 2:9, 9:11-14, 25-26), and we are to present our bodies a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). The gospel is taught in fact instead of in promise or prophecy (Acts 2:1-42; I Corinthians 15:1-4) and we no longer observe the sabbath day but the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2). The New Testament is our standard of authority today and not the ten commandments of the law of Moses for it was fulfilled by Christ and taken out of the way. However the principal of nine of those ten commandments are taught in the New Testament, thus, we must obey those things, not because they are part of the ten commandments but because they are taught in the New Testament. The Hebrew writer shows plainly that the New Testament is the last will and Testament of Jesus, the new covenant, and that it replaced the old (Hebrews 8:6-13, 10:9). In fact, study Hebrews chapters eight, nine and ten for a more in-depth study of the subject. (continued on page 4)

THREE DISPENSATIONS OF TIME

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Paul told Timothy to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF GOD" (II Timothy 2:15). It is necessary for us to rightly divide God's word in order to understand it and I believe a failure to discern the different dispensations contributes greatly to the religious division today. Always remember, **IT DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE WHAT YOU BELIEVE!**

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* * * * *

Myself

Would you know the thought that came to me as I lay half asleep last night, that startled me, keeping me wide awake till the shadows took their flight; Then here is the thought that held me fast as it came in dark to me: "I shall have to live with myself, no matter where I may be; wherever I live, and how long I may live, and whatever the things I do, I can never get away from myself." That startled me, wouldn't it you? And so, as I never can hide myself away from myself, you see, I must make myself so I can like myself, fit for the whole world to see.

* * * * *

L - O - V - E

An "L", an "O", a "V" and an "E"
Spells love as we can plainly see.
Our Heavenly Father sends His
To all people everywhere freely.

The word is small, The meaning is great.
Pass it on to others. Do not hesitate.

Love for one another
Does not cost a thing;
When it is returned,
What great happiness it brings.
(G. A. Ammann)

* * * * *

QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you in the church building occupy a
pew,
Turn around to see what others wear, or
Sit behind a head of uncropped hair?
Do you go to worship?
To hear God's word proclaimed
and join in hymns and prayer.
Or to just wait until the service is over
to mingle with friends that are there?

Do you sit at the dining table
With the family by your side, and
before partaking of the food
Thank God for all He did provide?

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).