

Fulton County Gospel News

"The Churches of Christ Salute You"

Second Class Postage Paid at Mammoth Spring, Ark.

Volume 12

Mammoth Spring, Arkansas 72554

February 1972

Number 14

Unity In Christ

In the past few years an annual "Unity Forum" has been conducted on the campuses of colleges "belonging" to differing segments of the Restoration Movement. Their object, obviously, has been and is the ascertaining of and maintenance of unity in Christianity. To be sure, such is a divine and noble cause. With the division existent within Christianity today, we all need to candidly restudy and re-evaluate why we are what we are and why we do what we do.

The criteria of judgement as to why we do and why we are certain things has been a serious problem. This problem has even been the source of division. On the one hand there are those who say unity in Christ - through Christ. On the other hand there are those who say unity in Christ - through the Scriptures.

This problem will be compounded until we can learn to have "unity" first! Unity is something of an abstract term. It is a little like the illusive butterfly, hard to pin down. It can be safely said that unity will not be an agreement by all people on all things even though unity is "an agreement; a harmony; a being united (joined)" (Webster).

There has been some controversy on the idea of "unity in diversity." Some say it is right, others say it is wrong. It seems to this writer that since all Christians everywhere cannot (or do not) agree on all things alike, and yet are not disfellowshipped by the brethren, that such is in itself "unity in diversity." How comprehensive this "unity in diversity" is, is a problem.

God condemns division (see: I Cor. 1:10; Prov. 6:19); God loves unity (see: Jh. 17:20, 21; Psa. 133:1; Eph. 4:1-3). It should be the object, therefore, of all Christians everywhere, to condemn division and love unity. An object of a divided Christendom should be a united Christendom.

The basis for this effort is either Christ or the Scriptures, i. e., the New Testament. This distinction, however, seems to this writer a bit absurd. Without the Scriptures man would have no knowledge of Christ. To do away with the Scriptures as the basis of unity is to do away with Christ; to accept Christ as

(Continued on Page 4)

How to Understand the Bible

In every phase of life there are certain rules that one must follow to obtain the desired understanding, or results. No man can work an algebra or geometry problem without knowing the rules. This is true in each and every science! No one can pick up the Bible and just let it fall open and do what he reads there and please God! For example, we read in Matt. 27:5, that Judas "went and hanged himself", then from Luke 10:37, we read, "Go and do thou likewise". Therefore one could hang himself and give chapter and verse from the Bible to support his actions! Yet we all know that God did not intend that these words be so understood.

Many today will read one verse in the Bible and conclude that that is God's entire plan of salvation to man. This is not true. Uninspired men divided the Bible into chapters and verses and no one verse, or chapter, or even book, is claimed by God to contain his whole duty for man.

WHAT IS THE METHOD OF UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE?

There are several simple rules, that if they are followed, any man who can read can understand God's will for him! Yes, any man who can read! Even if he cannot read, he can still understand it if read to him! You can understand the Bible if you want to!

1 — We must know who is speaking in the Bible. Many uninspired men have spoken in the Bible and even the devil! So we would not want to obey the devil, yet if we do not know who is speaking we may find ourselves obeying the devil, or some wicked man. The record of the Bible is true, but some deeds and words of some very wicked man are recorded there. We are not to follow these men, so we must know who these are that speak, before we follow them.

2 — We must know to whom the message is addressed! Example, Abraham was told to offer his son to God, no one else ever received such a message. So we would not want to tie our son and draw back a knife to slay him, for God would not stop us as he did Abraham. The command to build an ark, was given only to Noah, so we would not want to build a great boat as Noah did! Then we must determine to whom the message is addressed; to Christian, or an alien sinner!

The message, or commands, are not the same, yet some do not seem to notice this, thus err in their efforts to serve God. It does not take great skill to read the context to determine to whom this message is given. Every message in the Bible does not concern the same people and this we MUST learn if we ever obey and please God!

3 — We must know under what "dispensation" the message was given. There are three of these; Patriarchal, Mosaic and Christian. The Patriarchal dispensation was a period of time when there was no written law from God to man. God spoke to man in visions, dreams, angels, etc. What he commanded one person to do was not given at times to any other person: example, Noah and Abraham! The Mosaic dispensation was from the giving of the law to Moses and the other Israelites and the death of Christ on the cross. This law was only for the purpose of governing the Israelites until Christ came, Gal. 3:16-25. The Christian is under NEITHER of these laws today! We are under the Christian dispensation and the other laws serve as examples to us as to how God rewards obedience and punishes disobedience in all ages, Romans 15:4.

WHEN DID THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION COME INTO FORCE?

"For where a testament is there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth," Heb. 9:16-17. Christ's will (the New Testament), like a man's will, was not valid (in force) until he died on the cross! Therefore, Christ LIVED and DIED under the law of Moses! But when he died he "nailed to the cross" the law of Moses, Col. 2:14 This is so very easy to understand! Moses cannot look to the new Testament (Christ's will) for his salvation, for he was dead before the New Testament came into force! We cannot look to the law of Moses for our salvation, for it was dead before we were born, Rom. 7:1-4. The cross is the DIVIDING line between how God dealt with people in by gone times and how he deals with man today. No man can cross

(Continued on Page 2)

The Jesus Movement

By Clovis Ragsdale

We live in a day of fads. In dress, music, politics, and in almost every aspect of life, people are quick to accept some radical departure from the accepted standard. Almost all fads are short-lived because in practice their weak points became known. This is also true in religion and Bible doctrines.

In recent years a fad has appeared on the scene in the form of the Jesus Movement. It appeals to the young who seem to be searching for something different from what is practiced by their parents. It is in fact a part of the youth rebellion. The movement is to be commended in that it teaches the need to be Christlike in love of others and to be active in his behalf. It seems to teach unity and a spirit of togetherness.

We believe the Jesus Movement has missed the mark in two areas of plain Bible teachings. First, they separate the church from Christ. The Bible speaks of the church as being the bride of Christ. He is the head of the church. The church is his body. Read Eph. 5:22-33. To separate Christ from his church would be spiritual adultery. This is what has happened in the present day Christian world. There are about 300 so called churches today. It is comparable to a man who had 300 wives. The primary teaching of the fifth chapter of Ephesians is that Christ and his church have become as one. The secondary teaching is that a man and woman become one in marriage, and have duties one toward another. The last two verses bear this out. For a better understanding of the church and its importance we urge all to study closely the last twelve verses of this chapter.

Second, the Jesus Movement misses the mark in that it is not in harmony with the teachings of the Bible concerning spiritual gifts.

Miracles, tongues, and etc. were a part of the early church. They were necessary because the Bible was not in being in that the New Testament was not yet written. These gifts were the source of faith until the inspired writers like Paul, Luke, and other wrote the letters that we now have to guide us in serving Christ. Paul specifically states in the thirteenth chapter of first Corinthians that when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall end. The revealed word is that which is perfect, the part was the gifts. 2 Tim. 3:16, 17 teaches that the scriptures can furnish man to all good works and may make him perfect. Our

Harvest Time

The harvest was near and the beautiful fields of corn waved in the breeze. The workers began to gather for the season of harvest. At one particular field the grain was especially beautiful... that is... with the exception of the old barbed wire fence surrounding the field.

"Such a beautiful field deserves more," a worker exclaimed. "The old barbed wire must be torn down. Let us build a beautiful stone fence."

Soon the workers had built the beautiful fence and as they stepped back in admiration a small voice whispered... "LET'S HARVEST."

But surely such a lovely fence and field of grain needs a beautiful shelter to complement it and this too was agreed upon by the harvesters

Early the next day the work was begun on the shelter which indeed turned out to be a matchless structure of loveliness and fitting to sit by the field of ripe corn. Then the voice whispered again... "LET'S HARVEST."

"No! Wait! Our beautiful shelter needs a plaque above the door so all the passers-by will know to whom the credit for this lovely building belongs"... and this too was done.

This task was accomplished in due time and the field, the fence and the house with the identifying plaque were indeed a pleasure for the eye and a voice was heard to say... "LET'S HARVEST."

The time of harvest was here and amid the admiring gazes of the workers a small voice was heard to say, "LET'S HARVEST."

However, before such a tremendous task such as this confronting one demands the best of health, so it was decided among the workers to eat first... after all, does not one need nourishment to accomplish a great task. Then a small voice was heard to utter... "LET'S HARVEST."

faith comes from that word today and not from speaking in tongues and miracles. Romans 10:17 states the source of faith. It comes from hearing the word of God.

False doctrines, hypocrisy in lives of so called Christians, and a lack of love and zeal, has helped to create such as the Jesus Movement. In their zeal to correct the faults of their elders the movement has overshoot the true teachings of Jesus and need to adjust their teachings to what is revealed in the New Testament.

But alas! As the tools were gathered, they were found to be out of date and not at all worthy for the splendid challenge before them and with one accord the workers began to fashion beautiful tools worthy of the task. The equipment was eventually finished and the workers gathered around and with much handling and admiring speeches the tools were greatly praised... and a voice said, "LET'S HARVEST."

The appointed day arrived and the Master came and saw the field ready for harvest. As His eyes swept across... field — fence — house — plaque — and tools — his lips formed the words... "WHERE IS THE HARVEST?"

Have we not recognized ourselves in this parable as the world stands ready for the harvest of the gospel. As we scan the great harvest we turn our minds to the matters of buildings, clothes, preparation, methods of communication. Have we not forgotten our real purpose? Do we not tremble in FEAR OF OUR LORD?

SELECTED - Author Unknown

Along The Clothes Line

Years ago we learned the folly of making New Year's resolutions; like some rules, they're mostly made to be broken. But we recently ran across a something in the Houston, Texas Post titled: For the New Year: A Short Course in Human Relations.

The SIX Most important Words: "I admit I Made A Mistake"

The FIVE Most Important Words: "You Did A Good Job"

The FOUR Most Important Words: "What Is Your Opinion?"

The THREE Most Important Words: "If You Please"

The TWO Most Important Words: "Thank You"

The ONE Most Important Word: "We"

The LEAST Important Word: "I"

Not bad, we think, for our approach to another year along the clothesline.

The trouble with the younger generation is that it learns too readily from example.

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... is a monthly publication distributed free of charge to any who care to receive it. We will be happy to add any names to the regular mailing list. If you send in a name, be SURE to include the Zip Code Number. It must be with each address according to the Postal regulations. This paper is supported by unsolicited contributions for which we are grateful. If you care to know of its financial status and expenses, that information will be furnished upon request.

EDITORS: Clovis Ragsdale
and James E. Henley.

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Viola Church of Christ 5.00
Dellhalf Church of Christ 5.00
Agnos Church of Christ 5.00
Wheeling Church of Christ 6.50
Elizabeth Church of Christ 5.00
Bethany Church of Christ 5.00
Victoria Stark 2.00
Delson Stephens 10.00

**How To Understand The Bible
(Cont.)**

these lines for his own salvation. Each must keep and be judged by the law under which he lives and dies. Some men were under the law of Moses for a while, then under the law of Christ, Acts. 2.

SIMPLE

Now this is not hard is it? With this "key", you and I can unlock each book, chapter and verse of the Bible. When we read ask three questions: Who is speaking, to whom speaking and under which of the three dispensations does the message fall. This will create no problem. But if I do not consider these simple rules, I may be following the wrong command, to the wrong man and under the wrong dispensation. In other words, I may be doing things that God does not intend for me to do and be lost!

By Glynn Purdy

**God's Five
Spiritual Laws**

LAW NO. 1

One must hear the word of God. (Rom. 10:17). One does not become a Christian because he achieves some sentimental feeling or merely has a desire to find God. Only the word of God is the seed of the Kingdom — the begetting power. God's way (law) to become a Christian does not vary from church to church, nor is it determined by the whims of man, but His revealed way is binding upon all who would become His children. (Acts 10:34,35).

LAW NO. 2

You must believe in God and in Jesus as the Son of God. (Heb. 11:6; Acts 16:31). The existence of God may be reasoned by logic. (Hebrews 3:4). His power may be observed in nature. (Rom. 1:20). But He is revealed in the Scripture. The Bible written by the Holy Spirit, reveals Jesus and declares Him to be the Son of God. (1 Cor. 12:3). The same testimony of the Scripture which reveals Jesus reveals sin — its nature, its curse, and its cure. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:22).

LAW NO. 3

You must repent of your sins. (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30, etc.) The heart that loves God strives to hate sin, and in search of deliverance turns from his sin(s). A changed life will follow the change of heart accomplished in repentance.

LAW NO. 4

You must confess your faith in Jesus. (Matt. 10:32; 1 John 4:15) This is a confession of life that accompanies the Christian the remainder of his life. It is initiated by a confession with the mouth to the Sonship and Lordship of Jesus. (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37).

LAW NO. 5

You must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 3:21). This baptism is a "burial" in water. (Romans 6:9) Inasmuch as it is the completing act of man's response to God's offer to be saved (Mk. 16:16), he who obeys it is saved and automatically added to God's church. (Romans 6:14; Acts 2:47).

These laws have no merit in and of themselves. They are meaningful only because of the grace of God and of the love and blood of Jesus. They are not works of merit, but a work of faith; not works of man, but a work of God. (Titus 3:5).

Is Faith Foolish?

"To have faith is foolish." Such is the unreasoned position of many who do not wish to be thought credulous. To them faith is nothing more than wishful thinking, a psychological drug, a daydream, a tranquilizer, and they want none of it. They pride themselves on being hardheaded, objective, realistic, unemotional and factual.

But those who appear to be hardheaded skeptics can be the most credulous of all. For example, how factual is the man who picks up a copy of the Bible and calls the visible book a fact, but denies the evidence of transformed lives and spiritual power which have resulted from the Bible? Is all of this an illusion?

Even the fact that one disbelieves in God does not mean that he escapes belief. Such a person runs headlong into the belief in atheism, materialism, into faith that the ultimate, creative factors in the universe are physical particles operating blindly without mind behind them or purpose in them. But he still has a faith. Man cannot live in a vacuum. He has to believe in something; it's as natural as breathing. Have you ever really considered how hard it would be not to believe in something? If you do not believe in one thing, you will believe in something else, but you WILL believe. Psychologically there is no escape. If you listen long enough, you will even hear unbelievers explaining their beliefs.

Remove faith, find individuals who are unable to believe, and you will find emotionally sick people. There is a definite correlation between faith and well-being. As W. Curry Mavis states:

"Maladjusted persons usually have little capacity to trust. The person with a deep sense of inadequacy and inferiority, for instance, seldom has great faith. He projects his personal inferiorities onto God. There is a positive relationship between a healthful sense of self-esteem and faith."

Faith is not foreign to the nature of man; it is an integral part of his very being. That man who "knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man" said: "Have faith in God." If you are wise, you will heed His advice.

—John Gipson

Unity In Christ (Cont.)

the basis of unity is to accept the Scriptures. They are inseparable!

Unity in Christianity is to be based upon Christ. This does not mean, however, that anyone can forsake the teachings of Christ at anytime. Where and when Christ has spoken we apprehend.

For the sake of unity many religionists suggest that the arrangement of local congregations, i. e., elders, deacons, etc., the Lord's Supper observed only on the first day of the week, singing done only by the fruit of the lips, and many other items, be relegated to points of opinion or diversity and let us all unite in this diversity since many are already united in diversity.

Unity in diversity is the practical situation of every local congregation of Christ's church, but this does not involve a relinquishing of doctrine. Doctrines essentially the mountain to conquer in coming to unity.

Jesus Christ is proclaimed as "the only begotten son of God" (Jh. 3:16) and rightly so. But that is a statement of doctrine. The problem of unity becomes a question of how much doctrine is to be accepted. It must be understood that all Bible truth is essentially doctrine, and if truth is truth it must be accepted, not relegated, altered or compromised.

No finite man has the divine right to determine which doctrine Christianity is to accept or reject; Such is Christ's immutable right. Christ has selected the doctrines he wants his people to follow and His people should follow His doctrines. (Jh. 12:48).

If in the modern Unity Forums, or any other unity meetings, such an attitude is not maintained by all present, then any discussion as pertains to unity in Christianity is impossible until Christianity becomes united itself. (Which involves a personal confrontation with the Christ of the Bible).

What is your relationship with that Christ? There is no such thing as an extra-Biblical relationship with Christ; The only relationship that one can sustain with the Saviour is an intra-Biblical one. Until all Christendom determines to ascertain and maintain this intra-Biblical relationship with Christ there can be, there will be, nothing but more division and disunity pervading the ranks of Christ.

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Faith or Feelings

I knew a man a few years ago who seemed uncertain as to whether or not he was saved. When the local church would employ an evangelist to stoke the fires of emotion (which they called the work of the Spirit) this good man would go forward and seek for the experience that would assure him of being born again and thus being saved. As long as he could maintain a fair level of enthusiasm (called spirituality) he was sure he was saved. But since he couldn't maintain it for very long, he would decide he wasn't saved after all. So each year he would go through the same process again and again.

Such is one of the results of operating on the basis of feelings instead of faith. The truth is, the only possible way one can know he is saved is by faith in the promise of God, not on the basis of some feeling or experience. When one, by faith in Christ, repents of his sins, and is baptized as he is commanded to be, then he must trust God's promise that He has been forgiven of his sins and has been filled with His Holy Spirit. If one believes this, then he will feel good about it. It can be a marvelous experience. But the feelings follow faith, not vice versa.

I have known some who were baptized into Christ in years past, but because of some recent experience which was very meaningful to them, they decided they were not saved until they had this experience. If this were true, then our assurance of salvation would be based NOT upon faith in His word, but rather upon our feelings, our subjective experiences. This doctrine has characterized several Protestant groups through the years, but only recently has it begun to take its talk among members of churches of Christ. We need to beware of this insidious snare.

When brethren begin to operate on feelings instead of faith, teachings and practices of others tend to be of little importance to them. The only thing that is important is whether or not one "has the spirit" which being interpreted really means he is "operating by feelings" on the basis of the subjective. As a result they are "tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles" (Eph. 4:14). This thing of which we speak is both crafty and deceptive and we need to be very careful not to be deceived by it. For "... even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:14-15).
—Melvin Weldon, Campbell, Calif.

Authority In Religion

The need for a common accepted standard of authority in material affairs is immediately recognizable. General agreement is had in matters of weight and measurements because we do have a commonly accepted standard of authority. In religious matters division is seen because there are too many rules of faith and practice.

Jesus said, "All power (authority) is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Mt. 28:18) He is the head of all things to the church, (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:20-23) If Christ ever delegated any of this authority to men the Bible fails to show it. We must therefore assume that the right to make laws still is in the hands of Jesus. "There is one law-giver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another." (Jas. 4:12)

The religious world has not been nearly so much divided by what the Bible says as it has over men's speculations about what the Bible has not said! We could never unite on a human creed. One man could not be expected to do away with his creed book in order to accept another's creed book, which has no greater authority than the one he laid aside. And besides, following the doctrines and commandments of men is condemned, anyway. (Mk. 7:7; Col. 2:20-22)

The only reasonable source of unity is the word of God. When the church continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (Ac. 2:42) they were all "of one accord," (verse 46). When men came "speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them," (Ac. 20:30) then division began to occur. If all would but lay down their creeds and accept the Bible only, the cause of religious unity would be greatly improved.

Cliff Stewart

A little white lie is one that not only grows, but changes color.

