

"KEEP THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT"

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Unless the word of God is valued above the interests of men “keeping the unity of the Spirit” is impossible (Eph. 4:3). The attraction of unity was proclaimed by the Psalmist, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). It seems that religious men view union as unity. There is, however, a vast difference between the two ideas. The definition of “union” is an “act or instance of uniting two or more things into one” (*Webster’s*, p. 930). The definition of “unity” is the “state of being one; absence of diversity” (*Ibid.*). A study of the contrasts of these two concepts will be pursued along five fronts.

I.

UNION: A Result of Agreement Among Men.

UNITY: A Result of Agreement with God.

Men have set forward the basis upon which they could agree in the form of creedal statements. Presently, over 350 different denominational religious bodies have emerged. All men cannot agree among themselves, so different creeds represent different groupings. Therefore, union comes about. On the other hand, those who seek agreement with God have unity. Paul wrote, “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (II Cor. 6:16-18).

II.

UNION: A Result of Men Drawn Together.

UNITY: A Result of God Drawing Men Together.

Men have drawn themselves together in union religiously. Recent developments in the Southern Baptist Convention consisting at present of 15.7 million members show the arduous task of drawing men together and keeping them together. The key document which holds them together is called *The Baptist Faith and Message*. It is being rewritten to grant women a larger role in the denomination and to

acknowledge a more liberal view of scripture that has become generally accepted among the Baptists. More men agree with *The Baptist Faith and Message* in America than any other creedal statement because the SBC is the largest denomination in America. This is a fragile union.

Unity comes about when men are drawn of God. Jesus told of the power which draws men to God in John 6:44-45, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me." Jesus said, "Taught of God," not men. The difference between union and unity here is whether that which has drawn men together was a creed or the Bible.

III.

UNION: A Result of a Common Goal Among Men.

UNITY: A Result of a Common Goal Set Out By God.

Pious men have worked hard to create and maintain a common goal. Their efforts are rewarded with only a small portion of those who claim to believe in Christ sharing that same goal. Although a union stands between them, it is not broad enough to include all believers. God set out a goal for believers in Christ in John 10:16, "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Just as there is one shepherd, the goal set out by God is for all believers to be in one fold. The one fold is the one church (Eph. 2:16, 4:4). All who are added to the one church (by baptism, Acts 2:47) are in unity.

IV.

UNION: A Result of Men Having the Same Concessions, Confessions, and Professions.

UNITY: A Result of Men Speaking and Serving as the Oracles of God.

When men make the necessary concessions to be in agreement with one another, they have union. As has been indicated, they often write out a confession of faith and agree upon the message to be professed. But, unity is entered into and maintained by obedience to the word of God. Peter wrote, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (I Pet. 4:11).

V.

UNION: A Result of Men Being At One.

UNITY: A Result of Men Being At One With God.

Again the contrast between union and unity is pictured in the condition men accept of being “at one.” When men determine what is required to be “at one” with other men, union results. But, when men are “at one” with God, unity is realized. Being “at one” with God involves the biblical doctrine of atonement. Atonement is available only through the blood of the victim sacrificed as in Leviticus 17:11. The blood of Christ provides the means of atonement for all men today (Heb. 2:9, 9:22; Rom. 5:11). Upon obedience to the gospel a person truly has the “at-one-ment” with God that Christ alone gives.

Conclusion

The superiority of unity over union has become evident. Jesus’ prayer for the unity of all believers in John 17:20-23, which he prayed nearing the shadow of the cross, should be seriously and soberly studied by all who claim to value him as Savior. The Lord said, “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.”