

True Christian Unity

The cry for Christian unity is heard on every hand today, from Catholics and Protestants, modernists and evangelicals, and even some fundamentalists. What we need to do is get beyond the emotionalism of this ecumenical movement and consider what the Bible itself teaches about unity.

Ecumenism - efforts by Christians of different Church traditions to develop closer relationships and better understandings. The adjective **ecumenical** can also be applied to any interdenominational initiative that encourages greater cooperation among Christians and their churches.

John 17:21, *“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.”* The modern ecumenical movement has taken **John 17:21** as one of its theme verses, claiming that the unity for which Christ prayed is an ecumenical unity of professing Christians that disregards biblical doctrine. The context of **John 17** destroys this teaching, since the Lord plainly states that the unity for which He was praying is a unity based on salvation and truth and separation from the world.

John 17:6-19, in part, *“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and THEY HAVE KEPT THY WORD... For I HAVE GIVEN UNTO THEM THE WORDS WHICH THOU GAVEST ME; AND THEY HAVE RECEIVED THEM, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me... I HAVE GIVEN THEM THY WORD; AND THE WORLD HATH HATED THEM, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world... Sanctify them through THY TRUTH: thy word is TRUTH... And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified THROUGH THE TRUTH.”*

This is not a unity of true Christians with false and it is not a unity of sound doctrine with heresy. It is not a unity that ignores doctrinal differences for the sake of an enlarged fellowship. In fact, there is nothing in Christ's prayer to indicate that man is to do anything whatsoever to create the unity described herein. **John 17** is not a commandment addressed to men; it is a High Priestly prayer addressed to God the Father, and the prayer was answered. It describes a spiritual reality that was created by God among genuine born again saints who are committed to the Scriptures, not a possibility that must be organized by man. **1 Cor. 1:10**, *“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 and in the same judgment.”* We see in this verse that biblical unity is first of all a matter of having one mind. This is contrary to the ecumenical philosophy of “unity in diversity.” The type of “unity” that we find in the ecumenical movement is not true unity at all; it is confusion; it is “Babel.” Secondly, the unity that God requires is in the local church. This exhortation was addressed to a local church. It is possible to have the type of unity described here in the congregation, because doctrine can be agreed upon and enforced through a Church Covenant and Statement of Faith. **In our church we have the same doctrine of Christ, the Holy Ghost, Salvation, you name it, because we have a Statement of Faith and requirements for church membership, and we have a Pastor, Deacons, and discipline; but this is impossible in a broad ecumenical context.**

Ephesians 4:3-6, *“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”* In this passage we see true biblical unity and it is far removed from the ecumenical philosophy. **First, true Christian unity is a unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3).** This means that it is a unity involving those who are regenerated by and

led by the Spirit of God. Contrast this with the ecumenical concept of bringing together anyone that names the name of Christ regardless of his or her actual spiritual condition.

Second, true Christian unity is a unity of the one faith (Eph. 4:5). Biblical unity is impossible apart from the once-delivered faith taught by the apostles. God's people are called upon to *earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints* (Jude 3). There is no unity between those who believe and follow the Bible and those who do not. Note that *the faith* is not divided into cardinal and secondary issues. No Scripture is to be despised and set aside for the purpose of unity. In 1 Tim. 6:14, Paul taught Timothy to keep good, sound doctrine *without spot* until the return of Christ. Spots are small, seemingly insignificant things. Thus, Paul was teaching Timothy to value everything in Scripture. The theme of 1 Timothy is practical church truth (1 Tim. 3:15). In this epistle, Paul dealt with things such as church government (1 Tim. 3) and the woman's role in church work (1 Tim. 2). These are the very things that are typically downplayed in ecumenical ventures, because they are considered of "secondary" importance. Yet Paul taught Timothy to keep all these things without spot until Jesus comes. Timothy was instructed to allow *no other doctrine* (1 Tim. 1:3). That is the strictest kind of standard for doctrine, and when one holds that standard, it is impossible to be ecumenical even in the mildest sense.

Third, true Christian unity is a unity that is found in the local, New Testament church. The command in Eph. 4:3 is addressed to the church at Ephesus. It was not addressed to "the worldwide body of Christians." As we have seen, it is possible to practice biblical unity within an individual local church because doctrine and righteousness can be enforced and preserved there. Outside of the local church, there is no biblical discipline, leadership, or oversight. **When Christians attempt to practice interdenominational unity, there is always compromise because respect for other churches' doctrine results in division rather than unity.** I am not responsible to maintain a unity with every professing Christian in the world, but only with the believers in my church, in my local body, and with others with whom I am truly likeminded. The Bible says we are to glorify God *with one mind and one mouth* (Rom. 15:6). That is not a description of any type of ecumenism! This is only possible in the local church, where believers can be united together in doctrine and spirit and purpose in a way that is impossible in a broader context.

It is impossible to firmly stand for Biblical truth in all its aspects and to be ecumenical at the same time. We will either limit our message or we will limit our fellowship. **If you determine to preach everything in Scripture, then you will automatically limit your sphere of fellowship. If one is faithful to the Christian faith, it is impossible to have a wide fellowship in this apostate hour, and if one is committed to a wide fellowship, he must be willing to limit his message.** I'll just keep my King James Bible, it's good enough for me! Now, I fully believe in the concept of the FIMBF because each church is like-minded and agrees upon the same body of doctrine; however, anytime we see churches coming together, we must be very cautious because of all antichrists that are in the world! For instance, this *Awaken the Dawn* group calling churches to come together for prayer and worship (in Charleston, WV on Sept. 27-29, 2018) state that "*Walls of Division will come down... denomination or doctrinal persuasion will not separate us. Protestants, Catholics, Charismatics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, Calvinists, Arminians, and others will all gather*" (wvprayer.com). I'm not going to co-exist with these groups of people! This event is full of Contemporary Christian Music and modern translations. What we need is true Christian unity among Independent Baptists since we hold to the truth, and it is sad that we don't see IFBs come together more often, but that doesn't mean we should look to these groups to come together in unity since they are far away from biblical, doctrinal truth! AMEN.