

God's Plea for Christian Unity

The unity of believers is supposed to be one fruit of living out the commands of Scripture; how sad when division and dissent fracture God's people! The importance of unity is demonstrated in Acts 2, when the new converts were all of one accord (Acts 2:42). Acts 4:32 teaches that, "the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul." Jesus prayed for unity among believers in His great prayer of John 17:20-22. Christians are commanded to do their best to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Those who hear and obey Scripture ought to appreciate the Bible's enduring plea for unity!

Pictures of unity – Scripture describes the church as an, "assembly" to which God Himself added, "those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47). Elsewhere, the Bible describes the church as the bride of Jesus Christ (Eph. 5:22-33). Christians are described as a Divinely-built "building," the cornerstone of which is Jesus Himself (Eph. 2:16-18). The Lord told His apostles that He was the True Vine and that they, His disciples, were the branches (John 15:1-8). Scripture describes Jesus as the Head of one body, the church (Eph. 1:22-23). Notice in all these illustrations the common thread of unity prevails. God's word affirms that unity is good, pleasant and precious (Ps. 133:1).

How unity is achieved – Ephesians 4:1-6 gives insight into the process of attaining the unity God intends. First, notice that unity is inherent in God's finished work of redemption: it is, "the unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3). Ephesians emphasizes that God Himself is the One who has reconciled both Jews and Gentiles through the cross of Jesus (Eph. 2:11-17), and now both have access by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18). Second, notice that Ephesians 4:1-3 demands that Christians possess certain attitudes that promote the unity that God has established: "Walk... with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love." Third, notice that unity is based upon a standard provided by God Himself (Eph. 4:4-6). The "Seven Ones" as they are often called, are presented as a foundational standard by which Christians are to gauge their lives and behavior. A common redemptive plan plus adherence to a common standard plus a common interest in attitudes that promote unity will equal the kind of unity that Jesus desires His followers to enjoy. John puts it this way: "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Practical implications concerning unity – For Christians individually, several implications arise from God's plea for unity. First, unity takes **individual effort** on the part of every Christian. We are all individually supposed to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Elders and preachers should NOT be the only ones concerned about Christian unity. Second, unity is perhaps best understood and appreciated when Christians **work together** for God's purposes. Unity is almost

entirely academic until and unless Christians really get to work in the Lord's vineyard (cf. Phil. 1:5-8). Incidentally, it is not until Christians really get to work that the need for a common standard of faith and behavior is genuinely appreciated (cf. James 1:22; Matt. 7:24-27). Third, unity demands that we **love one another**. Love is to be the "buffer" between brethren that is practically seen in qualities like patience, kindness and the ability to, "bear all things" (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

God wants His people to be united as one. What are YOU doing to promote the kind of unity that God desires?

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