

# We're Different Because...

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Cover: Patriotic gentlemen work for the Yutana Barge Line in Nenana, Alaska, on the Tanana River. Photography by Sarah McMurray, for photography info email [sarah@spiritbuilding.com](mailto:sarah@spiritbuilding.com)

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**LESSON 1****BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IN  
UNITY, NOT JUST UNION**

**T**here can be no question that our God desires unity among His children. That is evident in the prayer of our Lord shortly before He was betrayed as well as in the direction of the Holy Spirit given through the apostle Paul to the Ephesian Christians. Three thoughts stand out from these passages that are worthy of some meditation on our part.

**Religious Unity is Only Found in God's Word**

Jesus prayed to this end, that all who came to belief because of apostolic teaching ought to be one. Unity will not be found in men's opinions. It is foolish to even consider that people from diverse backgrounds and educational levels might all magically arrive at the same opinion together. Quite to the contrary, opinions of men each based on their own thoughts and feelings, have always been great causes for division. Our own opinions may be wonderful fertilizer for our own pride, but they have little bearing on what God desires and even less power to join hearts together in harmony.

Even in the Old Testament, God made Israel to understand that He did not need the additional thoughts (i.e., opinions) of men, nor should any man subtract anything from that which He had given, Deuteronomy 4:1-2. Division and disharmony occurred when Israel rejected God's decisions in favor of their own. In one case they wanted their own leader instead of God's qualified man, Numbers 16:1ff. It was depending on human wisdom that divided Israel in the days of Rehoboam, following the death of King Solomon, and it was pride that kept it divided as Jeroboam led the Northern Kingdom into idolatry in order to remain as king. These things are written as our \_\_\_\_\_, 1 Corinthians 10:11-12, so that we might clearly understand that unity (as well as peace, security and salvation) is to be found in following God's will alone, without the mixture of human opinion.

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The New Testament echoes these same sentiments revealing to us God's unchanging nature when it comes to His own authority. In the teaching of our Lord, we find that He holds men accountable who seek to mix their own traditions with God's commandments. Two percent of poison mixed with 98 percent good food makes a potent mixture for killing rats. Jesus' statements were to the effect that mixing men's traditions with God's word adulterates sincere worship making it \_\_\_\_\_ (i.e., empty, worthless, of no account), Mark 7:1-9. Unity does not come from men's traditions any more than it comes from his opinions. In fact, mixing God's word with either of the above creates a "poisonous stew" that may have the appearance of spirituality, but, in fact, leads one to spiritual death because of worthless worship and disobedience.

Revelation 22:18-19 is another signpost that God has affixed in His word with the same message. Don't add to and don't subtract from God's revealed will. That is where unity will be found.



STOP

### **Unity is a Matter of Diligence**

The apostle says to "be diligent" toward keeping unity. Diligence is effort, work, and concern. In other words, unity is something we have to work at. It doesn't just happen, it has to be created and nurtured and developed. It needs watching and caring for as well as protecting sometimes. It is something worth being concerned about when problems arise. While we give thought to answering questions, we should also be giving thought to "how" we answer them and "what effect" our words and our actions have on others. That's part of putting forth effort to keep unity. This is not to say that one should hold back truthful answers because it might hurt someone's feelings or turn one away. It is to say what Paul said in Colossians 4:5-6. We should use wisdom in our conduct and grace in our speech so that we can respond properly and make the most of our opportunities.

**Colossians 4:5-6**  
Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.

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Unity is something that requires work. It takes work to sit on our pride and allow another's judgment to have priority over our own. It takes work to consider others as more important than ourselves. It takes work to control our temper when we feel challenged or to stay in a discussion when we feel like throwing up our hands and quitting. And it takes work to overcome our own misconceptions and misunderstandings so that we can accept the truth and grow. Unity has to be worked at; it is a matter of diligence.

Ephesians 4:4-6  
There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

### **Unity is a Matter of Oneness**

The above statement may sound redundant and foolish, but it may be closer to the heart of this matter than one might at first think. From Ephesians four we can see the Spirit's emphasis on oneness. The religious world has overlooked this point. They speak of unity, but what they actually practice is union. They practice many baptisms, accept many faiths, defend many bodies, and in actuality preach many gods based on their doctrines such as.....

- a grandfatherly God who overlooks sinful behavior,
- a God of confusion who treats different people in different ways,
- a God who saves you in spite of yourself and your choices to do evil,
- a God who allows you to be lost in spite of your desire to be saved, etc., etc., etc.

Division results from a failure to be in subjection to God's will. Unity will result when people come together in humble obedience. True unity as Paul wished for the Corinthians, in mind and judgment, will only come about as we are unified on doctrinal truth and practice as revealed in God's word. The oneness of divine truth will bring oneness among the believers of that truth when they seek and follow God's precepts.

Unity of belief leads to unity in understanding, which when coupled with humility, leads to unity in practice. Not just union, but real New Testament unity.

**Thought Questions**

1. Contrary to the preceding thoughts on the importance of truth in doctrine, humanism has been teaching since the 18th century that “truth is relative,” and “it depends on the situation,” and “whatever you believe is your truth.” How would you respond to this?

And part 2) What is the biblical description of unity?

2. Pick any two and give an example of personal comfort, old friends, family, peer pressure, or a majority of numbers affecting one’s personal beliefs, choices, and/or decisions in matters of unity.

3. Give two examples of the same in view of congregational decisions and unity.

4. Specifically, if you didn’t use this example above, explain how “family” can be a hindrance to unity 1) individually and 2) congregationally.

5. How can a lack of ability to recognize the “weightier matters” of the gospel affect unity. Please give an example.

6. Please describe one or more acts of “diligence” that will go far in preserving the “unity of the Spirit.”

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7. Name one point from this lesson that stands out to you as being of primary importance.

***John 17:21-23***

“that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us; so that the world may believe that Your sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

***Philippians 2:3-4***

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of other.

***1 Corinthians 1:10***

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

***John 8:31-32***

Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

***Matthew 23:23***

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.”

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