

# A Truly Biblical Union

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## Introduction

1. The striving for union among the churches grows apace; but, for real direction and soundness, with less and less vigor. We believe that the Lord of the Church has not left us without testimony also in this particular, and as Christians we inevitably look to Him for counsel and safe guidance. We believe that His testimony also in this important concern of His kingdom is to be sought and found solely in His Word of Truth, the sacred Scriptures, divinely inspired, dependable, true, clear, eternal, and unchangeable.
2. This testimony is found wrapped up with that which concerns the Church of God, the holy Communion of Saints, of which invisible Communion the visible group of professing Christians may be called the reflection.
3. Thus, even as the one true Christian Church is to be defined as the sum of those who believe in Christ, so that visible Church is the collection of all those who profess faith in Christ in accordance with the revelation of the Bible. And let those who would unite the Churches consider that the believers themselves are already one in this faith. (Eph. 4:3.)
4. The union if the churches thus becomes primarily a concern of the visible church; and in this concern this visible church will always consider the ever-present goal as it is written: "The is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye 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." (Eph. 4:4-6.)

## Theme: A Truly Biblical Union

God directs us in Scripture toward unity, first of all, and that a unity

- I. in the same simple faith,
- II. in the same sure and clear faith,
- III. about the same exalted and worthy goal,
- IV. about the same powerful means of grace.

### I. Unity in the Same Simple Faith.

1. Christianity offers a simple way of salvation, a fit basis for unity and union. Ps. 119:130.
2. Christianity is simple in this that
  - a. it teaches utter dependence on God in the matter of:
    - 1) revelation—2 Tim. 3:15–17.
    - 2) creation—Gen. 1:1.
    - 3) salvation—John 3:16.
  - b. it teaches this dependence solely through Christ. Gal. 3:26; John 9:25.
  - c. it creates this faith by the preaching of the Word. I Pet. 1:23.
  - d. it preserves this faith by the same Means of Grace. I Pet. 1:5; John 6:63
3. We vitiate and violate the very essence of Christian faith if we make it difficult. Gal. 2:16.
4. Both its advocates and its followers easily fall into the trap of making Christianity difficult. Gal. 2:18.
5. Because Christianity is so simple and so “easy,” it should be a simple matter to agree on its simple basis, Christ, the one Redeemer from sin. Rom. 5:1, 2; I Tim. 2:5.

6. Instead the reason of man and his emotional nature refuse this simplicity and change the very center of Christianity to one of supreme difficulty. This pertains to faith as well as works. Rom. 11:6.
7. This new basis appears easy and simple because it is nearer to the sinful nature of man; but in its teachings and in its requirements it is incomparably more difficult. Mark 7:13.
8. Then the inevitable tendency to compromise sets in and the desire to bring these two teachings together: the one pointing to grace, the other to works; the one simple, for the heart, and the other appealing to the mind; the one from God, the other from man. I Cor. 2:14; II Pet. 2:2.
9. This is caused by poor preaching, shallow theology, neglect in the study of Scriptures, love of the world, false teaching, pride. II Pet. 2.
10. Misled by all of this, men formulate a new theology and a new religion, which, after all, is very old. It includes all religion in a three-fold confession: God, virtue, immortality. With the first compromise with such natural religion the downward trend has begun, until the ultimate is reached in unionistic and syncretistic religion. II Pet. 2.

CONCLUSION I: Thus a true God-pleasing union presupposes unity in the simple faith in Christ as set forth in Scripture.

## II. Unity in the Same Sure and Clear Faith.

1. All knowledge is built on faith in someone or something. Hebr. 11:3.
2. The worldling bases his knowledge on faith in the intellectual process, in human judgment, in the study of nature, in emotion, tradition, prejudice, etc. Since this knowledge can never be either complete in content or perfect in understanding, this knowledge will never be more than relative. Rom. 1:22–25.
3. The Christian bases his knowledge on faith in the revealed word of God in Scripture. Since this knowledge has its source in the perfect understanding of God and is accompanied by His perfect and clear revelation, this knowledge is absolute so far as it goes. True humility accepts this knowledge in implicit faith, for it is from God. John 2:22; Ps. 48:10.
4. Since knowledge in the one case is only relative, in the other is absolute, that which is relative must submit to that which is absolute where the two might disagree; i.e., that which is of men must submit to that which is revealed by God. It is at this point that the unhappy conflict arises. II Tim. 3:16.
5. The Bible Christian is easily misunderstood in his seemingly stubborn position. Being convinced that the Bible is the Word of God and that it speaks in clear language the things of God, the Christian is helpless and must refuse any compromise by which that Word is affected. Luther's words "Here I stand. I can do no otherwise. God help me. Amen." are strikingly characteristic of the position of every true Christian. II Chron. 34:27; Acts 4:19.20.
6. The worldling is not so bound. Since his judgments, also in religious matters, are based largely on changeable human investigation and opinion, he is ready to change also religious convictions with each new discovery. Being in the nature of the case ready to compromise at every turn, he cannot understand or appreciate the attitude of the faithful Christian and his plain refusal to compromise the clear and unchangeable teachings of Scripture.
7. If a uniting of diverging groups is to be accomplished,
  - a. it can well be effected where both parties acknowledge the same basis. Thus, if both hold the Scriptures to be the inspired Word of God, it is theoretically and practically possible for both, by prayerful and believing submission to this Word, to accept the same truth. Or if both have accepted the second basis, human reason, there can be no serious objection to a compromise which will permit divergent human opinions to stand, both being uncertain.
  - b. a compromise between the two bases is never possible without a change of attitude on the part of the Bible Christian.

- c. this impossibility of a compromise will ever be offensive to the human mind and heart unless truly converted.
8. a. It is inevitably the case that he who does not acknowledge the Bible as the inspired and living Word of God will, even in all sincerity, advocate the joining of the one group with the other, pretending that the practical advantages urge this and that the differences are not important enough to maintain. In non-essentials we may hold different views, they say.
- b. The Bible Christian, however, recognizes that he can assume no authority over the Word of God, so as to decide what is important or unimportant. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Tim. 3:16–17. Where the plain Word of God is involved, that Word is supreme.
9. A unionistic compromise which endangers one clear word of Scripture is
- a. a sin against the Lord whose holy word it is; John 10:35.
- b. a forfeiting of the certainty of faith: for with the uncertainty of the basis of faith follows the uncertainty of faith itself; I Thess. 2:13; II Pet. 1:19–21.
- c. a gradual loss of the revealed truth, so that the content of faith becomes ever more meager and the rich treasury of the Word gradually disappears. Luke 16:17.
10. Upon the loss of the content of faith follows the gradual weakening of the Church
- a. as a lively confessing agency,
- b. as a powerful missionary agency,
- c. and as an agency to defend itself against the enemy from within and from without.  
Eph. 2:17–22; I Cor. 3:11; Matth. 16:18; John 10:27, 28.

CONCLUSION II: Thus, a true God-pleasing union presupposes unity in the same sure and clear faith.

### III. Unity About the Same Exalted and Worthy Goal.

1. The great task and goal of the Church is to make disciples of all men, the victory of the Truth in the hearts of all men. Matth. 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15.
2. The means by which this is accomplished is the Word and Baptism, i.e. the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism. I Pet. 1:23; John 3:5.
3. Through these simple means, faith in Christ as the Redeemer from sin is worked in the heart, and by faith men are accepted as children of God. I Cor. 4:15; Is. 55:10, 11.
4. Faith in Christ is the all-important characteristic of membership in the Church of true believers. Gal. 3:26.
5. The Church of Christ includes all those who by a living faith trust in Christ as their Saviour from sin, death and hell. I John 5:1.
6. By the means of grace, Gospel and Sacraments, these are preserved and nourished in this faith unto the fulfilment of a glorious hope. I Pet. 5:10; Rom. 1:16.
7. God deals with the members of the Church as those who possess a living and true faith, for nothing is hid from His eyes. He knows those who are members of the true Church. John 8:31. We must be satisfied to deal with them by their confession, not being able to know the heart. The Church of true believers is called the Invisible Church, being limited to those only who have a true faith. The Church that men know includes all those who profess the Christian faith, but among whom are hypocrites, due to the fact that men, their fellow-members, do not know the heart. Hypocrisy may pretend to a true faith without actually possessing it. Matth. 13:37f; Matth. 22:2, 11.
8. Union movements in the church are a matter of the visible church, since the invisible church of true believers is always and inevitably united spiritually by faith in Christ. Matth. 6:9; Eph. 4.

9. As a matter of the visible church, the responsibility falls on the members of the same to make sure that the contemplated union is a true reflection of the unity of the invisible. In order that it may present such a unity, its members must be joined
  - in faith, i.e. confession, I John 4:15;
  - in goal, i.e. work, Matth. 7:19;
  - in means, Gal. 5:9;
  - in manifestation of spirit, John 4:23, 24.
10. To unite in the task of advancing the true Church with those who do not believe the same is
  - a. actually impossible—for the true Christ is One; II Cor. 6:14–16. John 8:31.
  - b. dangerous—to the inevitable harm of the true faith; Matth. 7:15; Gal. 5:9.
  - c. deceitful and a lie; II Cor. 4:2; II Cor. 6:17.
  - d. directly contrary to Scripture; Rom. 16:17.

CONCLUSION III: A true God-pleasing union presupposes unity about the same exalted and worthy goal.

#### **IV. Unity About the Same Powerful Means of Grace.**

1. Since the success and the victory of the Church in its great goal are dependent on the Means of Grace committed by God to the Church, and upon these alone, the one great concern of the Church is the preaching, preservation and protection of these Means in their purity and richness. Acts 2:42; Is. 55:10, 11.
2. To preach the Word and administer the Sacraments on behalf of others, God has set the ministers or Servants of the Word, called by God through the Church to bring the Bread and Water of Life to the children of God that they may live.
3. These servants of the Word may occupy various positions and perform various functions according to the needs of the church and the specified stipulations of their call. As those who deal publicly with the Means of Grace they are all Servants of the Word. I Cor. 3:5; I Cor. 4:1. There are no other Means of Grace and no other Servants of the Word. *Ibid.*
4. Prayer—public or private, individual or joint prayer—is no Means of Grace; but it is enjoined and invited by God Himself as a privilege of the children of God to which He has added His blessing if offered according to His good pleasure. Ps. 50:15.
5. Christians may use other means to further the work of the Church and advance the interests of the Kingdom, all in accordance with God's will and under His blessing:
  - a. the giving of money to further the preaching;
  - b. the printing and distribution of Christian literature;
  - c. medical missions;
  - d. joint efforts of believers in other fields of endeavor pertaining to the Kingdom and not displeasing to God.
6. Some efforts should be regarded with care:
  - a. promiscuous radio activity, for fear that the doctrine of the call be disregarded;
  - b. improper use of the movie. God calls each Christian personally to be salt and light, instead of hiring another to take his place. Matth. 5:13–16; Jer. 23:21.
7. Let the Christians at all times make a clear distinction between those means which God has established and by which He blesses the Church—in these are the power of very God, Rom. 1:17—and on the other hand those means of men which are self-chosen and by which men would offer in love and gratitude to help the great cause of God.
8. The degeneracy of the visible Church often comes through such apparently innocent means and their thoughtless use.

9. Let the Church and its members learn to know and use diligently the means which God has provided, and depend ever more trustingly on the blessing of God so intimately connected with these.
10. And let the Christian and the Christian Church learn ever more fervently to *believe* the blessing of God where this blessing still fails to be seen.

CONCLUSION IV: A true God-pleasing union presupposes unity in the diligent use of and consecrated dependence on the divinely ordered Means of Grace.

### **Summary**

Outward unions in the Church are theoretically a matter neither commanded nor prohibited by God in Scriptures. Where proper conditions are present, such unions should be encouraged

- a. to reflect the unity of the true invisible Church,
- b. to advance the general cause of the Gospel.
- c. But without unity in faith, no union;
- d. even where such unity exists, practical considerations may cause outward union to become undesirable.