
The Unity of the Spirit

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"In the Bond of Peace"

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Dear Fellow-Believers,

Welcome to the first edition of this newsletter "The Unity of the Spirit" – in the bond of peace. As many of you know, I have for some time been wanting to start a regular newsletter dealing with biblical issues regarding both doctrinal beliefs and the practical Christian life. What you have before you is the beginning of an effort, with help and encouragement of many others, to make this desire a reality. Hopefully, the articles in this newsletter will prove to be a source of encouragement, strength and edification for all of its readers as we each endeavor to live a Christ-like life of love based upon the scriptures.

This last sentence makes several assumptions that are basic to the intended audience and point of view of this publication. First, it is assumed, and accepted, that those who will be reading this newsletter are believers in God and in his Son, Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and is now our risen Lord and Savior. It is the acceptance in faith of these fundamental truths that is the foundation of the Christian life (I Cor. 3:11). In fact, in Romans 10:9-10 Paul sets forth an explanation of the meaning of "the gospel" - that is, "the word of faith we are proclaiming" (Rom. 10:8):

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom. 10:9-10 NIV).

Simply put, to "believe in Jesus Christ" is to accept him as your risen Lord – a truth that is confirmed over and over throughout the pages of the New Testament.

Following closely upon this first point is our second assumption: it is assumed that those who read this newsletter will be endeavoring to live their lives in a Christ-like manner i.e., under his lordship. Paul's Letter to the Colossians sets forth this basic responsibility of "all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ - their Lord and ours" (I Cor. 1:2b NIV):

So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving (Col. 2:6-7 NIV).

Nothing could be clearer from the New Testament Scriptures than that it is the responsibility of Christian believers everywhere to live their lives in a manner that is worthy of the name of Christ. Though we all fall short of Christ's example, it is the responsibility of fellow Christians to help each other to "grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ" so that the church, the body of Christ, may "build itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16).

This task can only be accomplished by "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15) and this brings us to the final fundamental assumption of this newsletter. It is accepted that the Bible is "inspired by God" and can thus serve as our standard for determining truth in both belief and practice. This is

clearly the testimony that the Scriptures give about themselves. As Paul states:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17 NIV).

Only by relying on a correct understanding of the Scriptures can we be sure that our lives are being lived in harmony with God's will and to the praise of his glory. Therefore, the Bible will be our fundamental source and authority in our quest for truth in this newsletter.

It is probably obvious, and history would certainly concur, that the more detailed the definition or analysis of biblical beliefs and practices become the more difficult it is to achieve or maintain unity – that is, on the details. As the popular saying of the English language goes, “the devil is in the details” and we can certainly be confident that the devil himself has been busily at work over the last two thousand years to distort, confuse and even pervert what were clear and simple truths for the original readers of the biblical documents. I do not however believe that such confusion or division is necessary in regards to the Bible's central truths. Our quest must be to understand the Bible's central truths in the light of their original meaning and then to discuss the details in an atmosphere of mutual love, respect and acceptance for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ – i.e., in the bond of peace.

Amongst Christian believers who accept the testimony of the Scriptures there can be little doubt about the central truth of the Bible. This truth is set forth explicitly in Paul's First Letter to Timothy:

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony in its proper time (I Tim. 2:3-6 NIV).

It was for the purpose of proclaiming and teaching this “true faith” about the one God and his plan of salvation for the world that Paul was called to be an apostle (I Tim. 2:7). Surely, we would do well to make this task the central focus of our study in this newsletter as well - and so it will be.

The Bible, from beginning to end, testifies to the truth that there is one God, one people of God and one hope of salvation for all of God's people. This one true God, who is the creator, ruler and sustainer of the universe, has a plan for his people and creation which he is working out “in conformity with the purpose of his will” (Eph. 1:11). The Old Testament Scriptures set forth the background, promise and preparations for the fulfillment of God's plan. However, it is the New Testament Scriptures that set forth the accomplishment of this plan both in, and through, Jesus Christ – God's unique Son (John 1:1-18; Eph. 1:9-10; 3:10-12).

Today, because of the redemptive work of Christ – that is, his life, death and resurrection – we, as believers in him now “have access to the Father by one Spirit” and are “fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household” (Eph. 2:18-19 NIV). Thus, we are even now able to know God as our own personal Father and to worship him “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:22-24; Phil. 3:3). God, the creator of the heavens and earth, now lives in us, by way of his Spirit (Eph. 2:21-22). As a result, we are able to bring forth the fruit of this relationship in our daily lives so as to show forth his nature and character in all that we do (Gal. 5:22-23). So, as we study the Bible together in this newsletter let us always first and foremost endeavor to ...

Be imitators of God ... as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us ... (Eph. 5:1-2).

In doing this we will be doing our best to keep “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Richie Temple