

one baptism, one God (Ephesians 4:4-5). It is not man's prerogative to change that plan to suit his own comfort zone. We as Christians must learn to operate *within* God's plan — not create our own.

It is important that we also keep in mind that God does not condemn all division anymore than He endorses all kinds of unity. Many passages instruct — yes, even command division because of certain offenses. A few of those are listed here.

“...I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat.” (I Corinthians 5:11 NIV)

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” (Romans 16:17 KJV)

“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.” (Ephesians 5:8-11 NIV)

So why divisions? We *all* love peace and hate controversy. We *all* want to get along with *everyone*. However we must love the way of the Lord and His Word more than our own feelings. The Bible warns that there will be those who will depart from the faith but we are exhorted to stand firm.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;” (I Timothy 4:1 KJV)

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; (II Timothy 4:3 KJV)

“...refute those who oppose (sound doctrine).” (Titus 1:9 NIV)

“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you...” (I Corinthians 15:58 NIV)

So how do we stand firm? How do we let nothing move us?. We rely *entirely* on the Bible for our directions. We do things the way the *Bible* says to do them. And so that we know what that is, we *study* the *Bible* regularly — not books written by men who *profess* to have studied the Scriptures. In order to achieve the God approved unity for which Jesus prayed, we must do it the way the *Word* says to do it. And it is *our responsibility to know* what that is (Phil. 2:12 and II Tim 2:15).

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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So Why All The Division If Everyone Wants To Have Unity?

In the previous issue of *Diligence* we read numerous Scriptures that revealed to us that unity — God approved unity — *must* be based on His Word and therefore must also be based on “...*sound doctrine*...” (If you wish to review that issue, it can be viewed on line at the address listed at the bottom of page 4 of this publication). To conclude that we can establish unity with various denominations using a superficial basis and expect to have it approved of by God is *not* in accordance with the Scriptures. The love and unity spoken of in the Bible can not and must not exclude all other directives found in His Word. God demands that we follow the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth as revealed in His Word. Failure to do that is a “man made” kind of unity that cannot be what Jesus prayed for in John 17:20 and 21 (also see previous issue).

If a superficial unity contrived by man is indeed the ultimate goal that God would desire us to have, what then shall we do about those who are in grievous doctrinal error and perhaps even deny the most basic key elements of the faith? What about doctrinal error that is significant enough to perhaps cost them their very soul?

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.’ Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23 NASB)

Can we really believe that we show love for others if we purposely *choose* to *overlook* their errors for the sake of what we want to call “unity?”

Since we saw in the previous issue of *Diligence* that the Biblical concept of unity *must* be based on “...*sound doctrine*...,” we begin to understand that sound doctrine is the *very* thing that must unite us — not subjective feelings or a superficial unity that is subject to being broken — or at the very least damaged — if there is any serious discussion of doctrine. When we as sincere Christians, understand and accept true Biblical unity based on the sound doctrine of the Word, there is no longer an irrational fear that doctrinal discussions will divide the Body of Christ. Such discussions will instead lead us to a greater knowledge of the truth (I Tim 2:3-4) and a closer, more united fellowship.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27:17 NIV)

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“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” (I Peter 3:15 NIV)

Christians who desire to have God approved unity must accept a mentality of submitting to “...thus saith the Lord...” (appears 430 times in the KJV version). The love for “book, chapter and verse” must be uppermost in *all* studies. Every Christian in a divided congregation must be willing to accept *every word* of the Bible as Absolute Truth — *even* the parts they have *not* underlined in their Bible.

So why is there division? What are the barriers that prevent churches from having God approved unity? Let’s look at a few possible reasons.

1) FAILURE TO ACCEPT THE SCRIPTURES AS ABSOLUTE TRUTH — THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD.

“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 Timothy 3:16-17 NIV)
“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and Godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by his own glory and goodness.” (II Peter 1:3 NIV)

2) LACK OF KNOWLEDGE AS TO WHAT THE SCRIPTURES TEACH. There can be no unity unless we know what the Scriptures require of us.

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.” (II Timothy 2:15 NASB)

3) LACK OF RESPECT FOR THE SCRIPTURES — NOT RECOGNIZING THEM AS THE FINAL AUTHORITY. All that we do must be only as He has authorized through His Word — which is Truth. We must have Bible authority for all that we say and do or we are acting apart from the Scriptures and ignoring the Lord’s commands.

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17 KJV)

4) FAILURE TO OBEY THE SCRIPTURES. The Lord will save only those who have obeyed the Scriptures. Jesus is...

“...the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Hebrews 5:9 KJV)

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46 KJV)

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21 KJV).

5) FAILURE TO DEMAND THAT OTHERS FOLLOW THE SCRIPTURES. There can be no unity if some follow the Scriptures and others do not.

“...the gospel of Christ...is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth;...” (Romans 1:16 KJV)

“If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15 KJV)

“Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John 15:14 KJV)

6) ACCEPTING STANDARDS NOT AUTHORIZED BY GOD. Accepting what men have written as equal to or above God’s Words is a barrier to God approved unity in the church. The church of our Lord has no man written creeds or statements of faith. There are no synods, dioceses, catechisms or parishes in the structure of the church. There are no conferences or conventions common to the church for which Jesus died. Each congregation is completely autonomous. Specific practices and interpretation of certain passages of Scripture may differ from congregation to congregation. “Fine tuning” of *each* congregation of the saints is up to each congregation of believers and/or its leadership. The Bible must be the only source each group of believers uses to determine their own individual practices.

7) MAKING LAWS GOD DID NOT MAKE AND BINDING THEM ON OTHERS. Any individual who believes that s/he is infallible when interpreting the Scriptures is taking the liberty to speak in place of God. This is going beyond the inspired Word and such a belief will bring condemnation.

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:” (Revelations 22:18 KJV)
“Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.” (Proverbs 30:5-6 NIV)

8) IGNORING THE LAWS OF GOD. Taking liberties with the Scriptures by saying, “I know it says that but...” is an attempt to “spin” what God has clearly spoken. Since God gave us His inspired Word we must assume that in it, He says what He means and means what He says. We cannot take it upon ourselves to determine what was His intention rather than what He clearly spoke.

“Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God. Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.” (I Corinthians 4:5-6 NIV)

The world today is a world of division and confusion when it comes to religion. We see signs that read, “Attend The Church Of Your Choice This Sunday.” This is not the plan that God put in place when His Son died on the cross. The Scriptures clearly teach that there is *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* Lord, *one* faith,

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