

That The World May Believe!

By Burdett W. Wakeman

Talk about thinking big, here is a majestic thought encased in a divine expression of our Creator. Jesus uttered the words "that the world may believe" as an anticipated by-product of "perfected unity", meaning complete unity among his followers. It was envisioned in a petition to our Father in heaven.

Christian unity, a cardinal subject, is finding renewed interest in our changing times. A special supplement, 6/14/99 at <http://www.Christianity.net> on the internet caught my attention. Its title was, "A Call to Evangelical Unity." It observed that "most Protestants agreed (at least formally) on justification, though they were at odds over a multitude of other issues." Here now were prominent theologians sincerely concerned about division among professing believers in Jesus Christ and the church at large. They clearly allowed that "the biblical understanding of the Good News is, first, the most important thing, etc., and second, the only thing in which we can find true unity;" an astute observation.

The question is, how willing is Christendom to evaluate its tradition and man-made dogmas in the light of Christ's declaration? "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules made by men." Matthew 15: 8-9 NIV

Back in July, The Associated Press, carried items announcing a merger between the Episcopal and the Evangelical Lutheran churches. The fact that Jesus Christ called for Christian unity was stated as a reason for this union. Again, a sign of the times.

Back in the mid-forties efforts were being made to form "The Council of Churches" A coast to coast radio program called "The Town Hall Meeting Of the Air" featured discussions on current events. This ecumenical subject was chosen to air the discussion of a panel made up of prominent ministers. Their aim was to weigh the possibility of a meaningful ecumenical effort. Among them was the late Walter A. Maier, of the "Lutheran Hour" broadcast. After hearing the pros and cons he pointed out that they were simply agreeing to disagree, and then he laid out a formula for unity that cut to the quick. He suggested they "study their differences, study the Bible on those differences, and then take the Bible as conclusive." He was, as I recall, promptly told they were not interested in that. To the best of my knowledge, the synod he represented never did become a part of the ecumenical movement. Neither did I ever hear of anyone trying to work his simple formula.

Now comes a non-partisan endeavor reflecting Maier's three-step approach totally aside from him who conceived it. If it proves a workable concept we need to give credit to the one who in a fleeting moment uttered the words that, more than a half a century later, may be taking seed. Perhaps, like a tiny mustard seed boasts great foliage, this too will grow into spiritual fruition.

A serious endeavor to nurture heartfelt, true-to-the-Word Christian unity is emerging. The aim is to create a spontaneous search for Biblical oneness among professing believers in Christ. It is called "CHRISTIAN UNITY 101."

The intent is to seek both spiritual and academic integrity. This unity thrust is designed to be free of any ecclesiastical control. Participants are made up of Christians, both clergy and laity. Each individual must be committed to Christ as his or her Savior and accept the Bible as God Almighty's authoritative guide to God's will, essential to one's salvation and true oneness.

It is hoped that the simple "CHRISTIAN UNITY 101 Conduct Guide" at the close of this article will catch on and be the means of spontaneous, dedicated study forums. Be it many or few, they will have created an honest pursuit of Biblical unity.

In "CHRISTIAN UNITY 101, readers concerned with Biblical mandate have" a means of discovering true doctrine for themselves. It is an objective study plan that any sincere dedicated grassroots group of Bible-minded souls can launch. I reiterate the aim is not to create yet another ecclesiastical body, but rather is a simple means of discovering Biblical unity among believers.

It is hoped that by the time this item is published, many hours of earnest, Biblical study and monthly discussion forums will have been experienced.

Where there is no given ecclesiastical head or controlling church organization the effort has a chance of free expression built on genuine intent and honest Biblical examination. Each study will benefit in direct relationship to its commitment to the cause.

As you will see in the following "Conduct Guide", it is suggested that meetings be set up a month apart, allowing individuals and teams of two to five members to study prayerfully a given difference during the weeks between meetings. Discussions should prove the accuracy of presentations by informed participants. According to the "Conduct Guide" the chairman of each study must take an impartial posture.

Envision studies among believers in both communities and in student unions at local colleges and universities throughout the nation in pursuit of truth. Indeed such zeal might well give the world reason to believe in Jesus Christ and His love for them.

One minister contemplating the value of a "Christian Unity 101" effort in his community allowed that while the procedure was designed to bring students from various denominations together, he would consider such a study approach among people within the congregation he served as well. In this way those participating, aside from a community effort, will also gain biblical insights objectively. It must be emphasized that strict compliance to the Conduct Guide is essential if the discovery of God's will is to be had. Nothing short of a dedicated, heartfelt effort will do.

Prayerfully review the following "CHRISTIAN UNITY 101 Conduct Guide", remembering the reason being "THAT THE WORLD MAY BELIEVE."

CHRISTIAN UNITY 101 CONDUCT GUIDE

It is common knowledge among Christians that Jesus prayed for unity of believers. The following is His own heartfelt prayer for true oneness, granting us a clear insight as to His intent:

"For their sakes I sanctify Myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 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 you 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 have sent Me, and loved them even as you have loved Me. " John 17: 19-23 Nas

CHRISTIAN UNITY 101. Here now is a sincere effort to utilize a three stage formula with the help of much prayer and the Holy Spirit, allowing we are going forth "decently and in order." Our aim is to dispel, in the name of Jesus Christ, doctrinal division that has so easily beset us.

THE THREE STAGE FORMULA DESIGNED TO EFFECT A MEANS TO ACHIEVE TRUE CHRISTIAN UNITY:

STAGE ONE: Openly recognize our differences, listing and numbering them in order of preference for the purpose of review and study, one topic at a time.

STAGE TWO: Study the Bible on these differences!

STAGE THREE: Take the Bible as conclusive!

EXECUTING AN ORDERLY SPIRIT-ENDOWED PROCEDURE.

STAFF CHAIRMAN: To serve as moderator who will direct an orderly, pertinent discussion.

Chairman is not to become involved in the issues except to keep order. If he feels the need to express his opinion of the subject matter he must first relinquish the chair and take his place on the floor and wait for the vice chairman to recognize him. He is not to return to the chair until the subject at hand is completed.

SCRIBES: To record decisive and pertinent presentations. A tape recorder could be at the scribe's disposal.

MONITOR: This person must be able to write legibly the topics, etc. on a screen or board.

SECRETARY: To keep notes and data and to communicate with registered participants.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS

Each discussion participant must profess his or her allegiance to Jesus Christ. Also, each discussion participant must accept the Bible as the Word of God.

CHRISTIAN UNITY 101 CONDUCT GUIDE

STRUCTURING PROCEDURE

A monthly meeting is being recommended, starting at a given time to be announced in given communities.

Duly registered participants may take part as individuals or as a part of a team of three to five members. It is expected that all participants will use the weeks between the general gatherings to research, study and prayerfully prepare themselves to lend their convictions on a given subject to the general discussions.

Only registered participants will be involved in "on the floor" presentations. However the public is invited to witness the "give and take discussions" taking place at the general monthly meetings.

It is suggested that the monthly meeting be scheduled to run one-and-a-half hours but can be extended thirty minutes at the discretion of the chairman. This is to avoid climaxing at an obvious inopportune time.

Finally it is recommended that no participant identify him or herself with their church affiliation. The mention of a given denomination suggests doctrinal practices. A speaker or team must take responsibility for his or their claimed convictions.

People sitting in the audience may submit questions to the chair in writing. These can be answered at the chair's discretion from the floor or assigned to a participant who will be expected to answer them in person aside from the meeting.

Once a consensus is achieved, it is left to individuals and church bodies to deal prayerfully with whatever they believe is God's biblical intent. It is hoped that the oneness so prudently sought after will correct generations of misgivings and effect a true brotherhood among Bible-believing people. Granted, many fellowships may need to spend long periods of time reviewing and studying the scriptures to see if the findings of such a pursuit are correct or not. However it will be an effort reminiscent of those of Berea of whom it is said, "Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, for

they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so." Acts 17: 11 NAS

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

As a true student of the Bible, each must "be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." 2 Tim. 2: 15 Nas

To this end the following guidelines of interpretation should prove useful. (1) Who wrote it? (2) To whom was it written? (3) Under what condition? (4) What is the intent of the author? (The aim is to keep all scripture in context.)