

SPECIAL STUDY NO. TWO

Excerpts from an essay by Seth Wilson, Dean, Ozark Bible College, entitled,

"OUR LORD'S PRAYER FOR UNITY IN JOHN 17"

Why Must We Have Unity of Christians?

1. *Jesus wants it that way.* It should be enough that Christ prayed for unity of the church, who gave Himself for her, who will claim her for His bride, who will give to her all His inheritance.

2. *The Holy Spirit through the apostles urged unity.* Read I Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-6; Phil. 2:2; I Pet. 4:8-11.

3. *The practice of division will condemn us.* Read Gal. 5:20,21; I Cor. 3:16,17.

4. *We are commanded to avoid or turn from those who cause division.* Read Rom. 16:17,18; Tit. 3:10,11; II John 9-11.

5. *That the world may believe.* Division among the churches makes it impossible for the schools to teach the certain truths of Christianity, and it gives to every common-school pupil the false impression that religion is not a matter of fixed truth, but only matter of feelings and that every one makes his religion for himself, and it is just as respectable as any one else's religion. However much we may wish and agitate for the public schools to teach Christianity, they simply cannot do it while divisions continue to exist. The world discounts or disregards the testimony of a divided Christendom, just as we discount the so-called "scientific" conclusions which differ from and contradict one another while all are represented as "assured results." The less we care about contradictions in our testimony, the less the world cares about our affirmations. If it does not make any difference *what* one believes, it probably does not make any difference *whether* one believes. If one church is as good as another, possibly none is as good as any, since both statements rest upon the assumption that falsehood is as good as truth, disobedience as good as obedience.

6. *Because division comes from putting human authority in the place of Christ.* At least in some part it displaces Christ as the head of the church, and that is blasphemy. See Eph. 1:20-23.

7. *Because division comes from putting the words of men in the place of the infallible word of God.* At least in some part it displaces the Holy Spirit as the revealer and spokesman of Jesus Christ and His covenant. See I Cor. 2.

8. *Because Christ is one and not divided.* We cannot be perfectly united in and with Him without becoming united with each other. If we have the mind of Christ we will have the same mind, and so on

through all the characteristics of the Christian which we receive from Christ Himself. Unity is natural and inherent in Christianity; and division among Christians misrepresents its nature.

9. *Because division wastes and dissipates the energies and resources of evangelistic workers and supporters;* furthermore, it turns a great bulk of religious effort from evangelism to party promotion and party regulation and party contentions. If all the printers' ink, if all the hours of study and conference, if all the money and men that have been employed to keep up human institutions had been used to bring men to their Savior, what glorious results might have been! As it is five centuries of vigorous denominationalism leave the churches far from holding their own against an avowedly pagan world. "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

To sum up, all the causes of division are sinful; all the results of division are shameful; all the characteristics of division misrepresent Christ and despoil the godly character. Surely division is of the devil and is his best implement for hindering the church from victory. The faith, devotion, obedience and brotherliness that produce unity are godly. The practice of unity is sweet and blessed (Ps. 133:1). The results of unity are faith and its glorious victory. Its goal is that all should be perfected into one in Christ. Can any man doubt that unity is of God and is a prerequisite to a victorious church?

What is the Unity for Which Christ Prayed?

1. Jesus in His prayer describes it briefly, but exactly: "as thou, Father, are in me, and I in thee." We in them and they in us.

2. Such as the world can see: "that the world may believe." The purpose of unity is faith and conformity to Christ. A union without faith and obedience defeats its own purpose.

3. A fellowship of those who are called of God and set apart for His name, to do His work by His Spirit, using His Word—all in every place "that are sanctified." Study the word "sanctify" and its other forms with a concordance, or see the article "Sanctification" in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

4. It is such a vital relationship as is described by figure of the members of the body in relation to the head (see I Cor. 12; Rom. 12:4,5), or of the branches to the vine (John 15:5).

5. Such as existed in the apostolic church when "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32).

6. Such as prompted the Gentile Christians to send help to Jewish Christians in time of need (II Cor. 8:1-9; especially verse 5).

7. Such as is indicated in the following words used in apostolic exhortations: "speak the same thing," "Be perfectly joined together,"

"same mind," "like-minded," "same love," "of one accord," "preferring one another," and "with one accord and one mouth." See I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 2:2; Rom. 12:10,16; 15:1-6; I Cor. 12:25,26.

8. Such as is characterized by "one Lord," "one faith," "one baptism," "one body," "one Spirit," "one hope," "one God and Father over all, in all and through all" (Eph. 4:1-6).

Can any man imagine that the state of Christendom today is the unity that pleases the Lord?

Note particularly that it was unity in faith, "the faith once for all delivered unto the saints." Jesus prayed that *those who believe* might be one. It was He that said, "but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Paul, who so earnestly urged the Corinthian brethren to unity and love, closes his great letter of correction with this: "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (I Cor. 16:22). In Gal. 5:20,21 divisions under every name are condemned, but in Gal. 1:8,9, Paul writes: "If any man preach unto you any gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema." In the first Epistle of John, Christian love and fellowship are upheld in their true nature and necessity, but in II John 9-11, Christians are strictly commanded to refuse fellowship to "anyone bringing not this teaching." Jesus commended the church at Ephesus because they could not endure evil men and did try false apostles (Rev. 2:2). He held it against the churches at Pergamum and at Thyatira that they had there some that held injurious teaching (Rev. 2:14-16,20).

Unity of believers with unbelievers is so impossible that intermarriage of the two is not to be attempted (Read II Cor. 6:14-7:1). They could have a form of union, but not unity sanctified in Christ. "What portion hath a believer with an unbeliever?" "Or what communion hath light with darkness?" How can we hope to promote true unity in Christ while we disregard Christ's will and harbor unbelievers within the fellowship? Study and apply the following scriptures: Roman. 16:17-19; Gal. 1:6-9; Tit. 1:9-16; Tit. 3:10; I John 2:18-26; 4:1-6; Jude 3,4; II Cor. 10:3-5; 11:13-15; I Tim. 6:20,21; II Tim. 3:5; Eph. 5:7-12.

PROPOSITIONS from an article by Ernest Beam, CHRISTIAN STANDARD, October 8, 1949

Proposition 1. All sincerely immersed into Christ, with manifest purpose to be governed of Him, are one body in Jesus Christ, though some are now also in denominational churches and others also in church of Christ sects.

Proposition 2. All of those in next above are commanded of God to receive one another as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Proposition 3. The receiving of brethren in Christ is never an endorsement of weakness, immaturity, and error even as Christ's reception of us is not His endorsement of our weakness, immaturity, and error.

Proposition 4. Those who will not receive the brethren but do dis-fellowship them, or some of them, are, on that account, to be marked, avoided, and rejected, even as the man under the old law who did kill was himself to be put to death.

Proposition 5. The Scriptures forbid any sincere brother to violate his own conscience in religious acts and devotions whether that conscience is at present properly taught or not; and the Scriptures forbid the rest of us to ignore that conscience. Nor is our own liberty to be judged of another conscience.

Proposition 6. It is not necessary for the brethren to be of the same mind upon meats, days, circumcision, the law, colleges, missionary organizations, orphan homes, instrument, "pastor system," cups, war, premillennial views, tobacco, classes, uninspired literature, names, or other such, as conditions of salvation and of receiving one another. Those of Proposition 1 are one body notwithstanding these and like differences.

Proposition 7. Division in the body of Christ is always made by the brother who will not fellowship his brother. (This does not mean there are not times that a brother must disown a brother; there are. But the brother who disfellowships always and everywhere makes the division—those that should never be, as well as those that must be.)

Proposition 8. The brother, though right about every item in Proposition 6 above is not permitted to bind that right, as a condition of receiving, against his brother who does not yet perceive the right.

Proposition 9. The receiving of all those sincerely in Christ, by Paul, did not stop him from successful labor to overcome the wrongs of those received, but did enhance the working of it. The receiving by all of us, each of the rest of us, in Proposition 1 above, by the wonderful grace of our God, can and should work the same way.

Proposition 10. No more grace is required in my heart to receive my brother, as set out above, than is required in Christ to receive me now and hereafter. (Yea, the comparison is an unworthy one, but is used to turn the mind toward working of grace *from* us as it has come *to* us.)

Proposition 11. The Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles were not compromisers and betrayers of the gospel in receiving brethren with error of whom we read in the New Testament; we are the

compromisers and betrayers of their gospel when we do not so receive one another.

Proposition 12. The Holy Spirit as certainly commands not to own all those who come among us not of genuine faith in the whole mystery of Christ revealed in Scripture (II John 7-11; I John 4:2,3) or who are not of mind to consent to "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the doctrine which is according to godliness" (I Timothy 6:3) as He does command us to receive the brethren of genuine faith. (We may together own the authority of the dictionary, but fail of meaning, proper usage, and pronunciation in keeping with that authority. We must together own the authority of Jesus and of His Word, or oneness is neither possible nor permitted.)

Proposition 13. It is as hurtfully erroneous to try to make God speak in the field of necessary judgment—the circumstantial of the gospel left to the judgment of the brethren and the expediency of which changes through the centuries with changing means and agencies of society—as it is not to hear God in the great realm of faith where He does speak.

Proposition 14. In all matters of faith a thing must be lawful before it can ever be expedient; in all matters of necessary judgment a thing is not to be judged of right or wrong but whether it is a good and useful means to attain the given end.

Proposition 15. The use of any and all humanly adopted means and methods must ever be kept within the realm of *enabling* what God has commanded and never used upon a par with, as an addition to, as a part of, or exalted above the thing commanded or those appointed of God. (The use of uninspired literature to *enable* the teaching of God's Word is one thing. But to make use of it as upon a par with, added to, a part of, or exalted above God's Word, is grievous error not to be tolerated. The same is true of all things whatsoever that have been left to the judgment and wisdom of men.

Proposition 16. To charge a brother with an addition to the Word who uses uninspired literature to *enable* the teaching of the inspired Word; or to "the cup" who but uses individual cups to *enable* the communion of "the cup"; or to sing who but uses the instrument to *enable* singing, decency, and order; or to the one organization of the New Testament who but uses colleges, missionary organizations, orphan homes, old folks' homes, organized classes, and journalistic organizations to *enable* orderly obedience to the commands of God—this is false accusation against brethren and divides those who are of the same faith.

Proposition 17. The adoption of any test of fellowship not clearly

demand in Scripture is to adopt a condition of salvation—a new and added commandment—unto the perversion of the gospel. This is the very sin of Galatians the first chapter, and is the sin which has made a multitude of sects particularly among those who do not use the instrument. It is also the sin to which Paul would submit, "no, not for an hour."

QUOTED FROM MISSION MESSENGER NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 1964, EDITOR W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

2. DO YOU THINK THE PRAYER OF JESUS CAN BE ANSWERED BY RESTORING THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT?

No, I do not. The restoration movement launched by the great heroes of the faith in the early part of the nineteenth century was simply a means to an end. It was never intended to be an end in itself. Alexander Campbell wrote, "We only profess to work and walk by the rules which will inevitably issue in a pure speech, and in right conceptions of that pure and holy, and celestial thing called Christianity—in faith, in sentiment, and in practice." It is too much to expect of these noble pioneers that they would be able to either discover or translate into practice all that was essential to the accomplishment of their aims. The restoration movement was vital precisely because it was a movement. To return to it at any given point and assert we had "arrived" would be folly. When a movement ceases to move it becomes a monument to past accomplishments and dead hopes.

Alexander Campbell did not believe he had all of the answers. He freely admitted that to enter some areas of consideration "we should have to launch upon a wide and tempestuous ocean, for which our slender bark is not at this time sufficiently equipped. This may yet deserve the construction of a larger vessel in a more propitious season." Our task, as I conceive it, is not to restore a movement inaugurated by men but to recapture the ideal of God. We believe that in this we may be aided by restoring to our generation the spirit of the restoration movement. Even this must be regarded as a means to an end.

16. WHAT DO YOU RECOMMEND WE SHOULD DO TO RESTORE A PROPER FEELING OF UNITY AMONG THE BELIEVERS?

We should confess to one another that we have been partisan and sectarian in attitude and pray one for another that we may be healed of the ravages upon our hearts of this work of the flesh. We should be brought to our knees in tears over our growing sectarianism. We should set the table of the Lord for every sincere immersed believer

and invite all such to sit down around it as our brethren. We should call upon all of them, recognize and regard them as children of our Father.

It is time for us to throw off the childish attitude which has characterized the brotherhood and start acting like men. The idea of categorizing those who differ with us as "brethren in error," with the implication that we are wholly free from error and know all there is to know, is a little silly when you think about it seriously. The truth is that we are all brethren in error. Not one of us is perfect in knowledge and we all have a great deal to learn. We do not accept one another because we are free from error but because we are free in Christ—free to receive one another even while we try to work out our problems together and seek to arrive at a greater understanding. The brethren who accept me will have to overlook a lot of things just as God had to make allowances in order to receive me. I am willing to receive others on the same basis as he received me.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

There is no more time for private counsel with the disciples. The hour of darkness has come. Between chapters 17 and 18 of John's gospel, the agony of Gethsemane transpires and is recorded in the Synoptics. And now in chapters 18 and 19 of John's gospel the darkest deeds ever perpetrated by man are recorded for all men to feel for all time their shame.

Simeon the aged prophet told Mary, the mother of Jesus, some thirty-three years before this night, "Behold, this child is set for the falling and the rising of many in Israel; and for a sign which is spoken against; yea and a sword shall pierce through thine own soul; that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." (Lk. 2:34-35).

In other words, Jesus was born to be a "sign spoken against" or a spectacle. The spectacle is about to begin. He will be betrayed by one of His closest friends. He will be arrested, mocked, ridiculed, falsely and illegally tried and condemned. He will be denied by the one closest to Him and the same one who swore that he would never let Him down. Then, declared innocent at first, He will, because of political expediency, be given over to His murderers. But through it all it was not the Son of God on trial—it was mankind on trial that black night. At the end of this chapter we have a sermon entitled "Mankind on Trial."

Isaiah, some 700 years before this night, had prophesied, "He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers