

LESSON 24

GREAT BIBLE THEMES

CHRISTIAN UNITY

In our twenty-first century world we have hundreds of different religious bodies, each claiming to be based on the Bible. Many of the doctrines of these various groups contradict the doctrines of others. There are two distinct attitudes that we may have toward this situation. The first is that, since there are so many, each individual can find the one that appeals to him and be thankful that there are so many because it does enable everyone to find the church of his choice. The second attitude is that we should make an effort toward a unity of all believers. There are many different ideas about how this could be done. This suggests the following questions: . . .

1. Was Jesus concerned about the unity of all His followers?
2. Did the New Testament writers devote considerable attention to this topic? Summarize their teaching on it.
3. What suggestions does the Bible give us to how we may have Christian unity? List four such suggestions.
4. What reason did Jesus assign for wanting His followers to be united? Do we see the danger of this today?

_____.”
 Jesus was concerned that they be “kept” and that they might be united as one, just as Jesus and the Father were one. As He continued His prayer He prayed, (verse 20-21), “Neither pray I for these (apostles) alone, but for them also _____; that they _____: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also _____ in us: _____.”

_____.” Would it be correct to say that the greatest concern Jesus had for those who would believe on Him in the future was that they might be united or be one? If Jesus was thus concerned, could we, as His followers, be unconcerned about this great problem? We want to examine the reason He gave for wanting people to be one after we have noticed the teachings of the New Testament writers on this subject. In each of the following references you will find an expression of the concern of the inspired writers relative to the unity of the believers to whom they were writing.

1 Peter 3:8, “Finally, _____, having compassion one of another.”

Philippians 2:2, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be _____, having the same love, being of _____, of _____.”

Romans 16:17, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which _____”

_____, contrary to _____ which ye have learned: and avoid them.”

Ephesians 4:3, “Endeavoring to _____ in the bond of peace, there is _____, and _____, even as ye are called in _____ of your calling; _____, _____ and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

Many other references could be given, but we want to call special attention to the first part of 1 Corinthians. Paul devoted the first three chapters of this letter to the subject of division in the church at Corinth. Notice the attitude toward divisions expressed in 1:10, “Now I beseech you, Brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye _____, and that there _____; but that ye be _____ in the _____ and in the _____.” The nature of their divisions is given in verse 12. “Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am _____; I am _____; I and _____.” Paul had established the work of the Lord in Corinth, Appollos was one of their talented teachers, and Peter was a leader of the original apostles. They were divided over their teachers. In 4:6 Paul

gave an insight into the cause of this trouble when he said "that ye might learn in us _____

_____ _____ _____
_____, _____
_____." Do you suppose

many of the divisions in the religious world today are brought about by people following after men instead of following what has been written in the Bible for us to do?

Notice a few statements that show that Paul thought such divisions to be sinful. 1:13, "Is _____

_____? was Paul _____
_____? or were ye baptized in the _____

_____?" 3:3-4, "For ye are _____
_____: for whereas there is among

you _____, and _____, and _____,
are ye not _____, and _____

_____? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; _____

_____?" This term "carnal" means worldly as opposed to spiritual. Does Paul definitely state that divisions are worldly and wrong?

Our next major question deals with the topic as to how Christian unity may be attained. Does the Bible give us some principles to guide us in the solution of this problem? The first principle we mention is found in 1 Corinthians 1:10, which we have already noticed. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that _____

_____ _____ _____
_____, _____

_____.” Notice also 1 Peter 4:11, “If any man speak, let him _____
_____.” This means speak what has been revealed to us by the Spirit of God. Would it bring religious people much closer together if they should speak what God has revealed to us and nothing more.

Notice the principle given in Philippians 3:16, “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, _____
_____, let us mind the same thing.” See also 1 John 1:7, “But if we _____
_____, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another.” Paul calls attention to a fundamental notion in 2 Corinthians 5:7, “For we _____
_____, not by _____.” Notice how we may abide in Christ’s love. John 15:10, “If ye _____
_____, ye shall abide in my love.” If all believers in Jesus would walk by the “same rule” walking in “the light” of God’s revealed truth, “by faith”, always keeping God’s commandments, would we be divided or united?

Someone has suggested that the real key to Christian unity is to be found in the terms, “submission to the will of God”. If I submit to His will and do His bidding and you submit to His will and do His bidding, we will be united because we have both given up our personal ideas and have accepted God’s way of life. Notice that the unity between God and Jesus was on this basis. See the last part of John 5:30, “I seek not _____
_____, but the _____
_____ which hath _____
_____.” Notice also John 6:38, “For

4. We are saved by faith only.
5. Become a member of New Testament church.
6. Baptism is not essential at all.
7. We are saved by works and not by faith only.
8. Only immersion is Scriptural.

We need to unravel these statements in order to see what they are. We have numbered them to help us understand. Number 1 says, "Baptism is essential to salvation", while Number 6 says, "Baptism cannot be essential to salvation". These statements are contradictory. Number 4 says, "We are saved by faith only", while Number 7 says, "We are saved by works and not by faith only". We have written eight statements. Suppose we should add the different ideas set forth by the differing religious bodies on the subject of salvation to the eight we have listed above and then give this to the sincere seeker for the truth and say, "Here is a chart showing you what you should do to be saved". What would be his reaction? Do you suppose he might say, "I can't believe in a book or a Christ that is so confusing." This is the very reason that Jesus prayed that his followers would be one because division among them would cause some not to believe.

You, perhaps, know of good citizens who have not identified themselves with any religious body because they do not want to be a part of a division. No wonder Jesus made this the burden of His prayer at a time when He was almost face to face with the agonies of the cruel cross. Can we then treat lightly the divided state of the Christian world today?

TEST

1. (a) It was Jesus' desire that all his followers be divided into numerous conflicting bodies so that one could join the church of his choice or, (b) Jesus prayed that all of his followers be one to the degree that He and God were one. What statement is true?

2. The apostles of Christ (did, did not) teach unity among believers. _____

3. Jesus laid down a principle, and lived by it, that all believers in Him ought to imitate. It was: (a) to seek to do His own will, (b) to seek to please men in His teaching, (c) not to do His own will, but to do the will of God, (d) to be guided by popular teaching.

4. Christians are spoken of as being "in Christ". Did Paul say that Christ was divided? (Yes or No) _____

5. In discussing Christian unity, Paul taught that: (a) all must speak the same thing, (b) no harm is done when conflicting doctrines are taught, (c) it was impossible for all to speak the same thing, (d) each one may have his own philosophy of religion and God will be well pleased. _____

6. Believers in Christ are instructed to: (a) walk by various denominational rules, (b) walk by the same rule, (c) walk according to the course of this world, (d) walk in darkness, in ignorance of God's word. _____

7. This unity is made possible by: (a) studying our own church dogmas, (b) all speaking as the oracles (word) of God, (c) not speaking anything that would conflict with others' religious feelings, (d) discarding the Bible and setting up our own rules of faith and practice. _____

8. Paul taught by divine guidance that division among believers in Christ was a sign of: (a) deep spirituality, (b) very intelligent people, (c) true Christianity, (d) carnality or worldliness.

9. Does God approve of people who say, "I am a Christian after the order of Paul", or "I am a Christian after the manner of Apollos", or "I am a Christian after the particular teachings of Cephas (Peter)"? (Yes or No) _____

10. The way to cause the world to believe that God sent Christ to the world to save it would be: (a) for those that believe in Christ to be of one mind and one speech and walk and practice, (b) for those who believe in Christ to be divided into some 250 different religious denominations, (c) to place the Bible on a par with human wisdom, (d) to accept only what we want out of the Bible and disregard the rest. _____

Score: 10 points for each correct answer. _____

Correct answers to questions in lesson 23:

1. (false)
2. (b)
3. (did)
4. (a)
5. (c)

6. (false)
7. (a)
8. (false)
9. (d)
10. (true)

List others who wish to take this course.