

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

Volume 15, Issue 5

May 2017

The Unity of the Faith

Introduction

In last month's Teaching Letter, "Goal of God's Work", we saw that God is bringing to completion His ultimate intention that He purposed in Himself before the foundation of the world. To accomplish this, He sent Jesus, as the Lamb, to make atonement for our sins and, as the Last Adam, to restore us to a place where we can fulfill our *potential* for which we were created. After Jesus ascended, He sent to us the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father, to make us *capable* of fulfilling all that God desires for His creation by bringing us into maturity as the sons of God. Jesus also gave His ascension gifts to His people—the five fold ministry. God has given to us all that is needed to complete His purpose. We can't neglect the purpose of any of what God has given if we desire to be of value to the process of His ultimate intention being realized.

The Holy Spirit works with us directly, individually, to bring us to maturity and to lead us as sons of God. The Holy Spirit works through the equipping gifts, the five fold ministry, to bring the Church, the *ekklesia*, the Body of Christ, into corporate maturity. Ephesians 4:13 gives four objectives for the work of the five fold ministry, which is to continue to function in the earth until these four objectives are accomplished.

The first objective of the equipping gifts is to bring us into a corporate "unity of the faith". This has not been accomplished in the corporate Body because, in times past, the functions of the equipping gifts have not been recognized. The Institutional Church only recognizes Shepherds or Pastors and sometimes, so-called evangelists. No wonder that we lack corporate maturity. We are trying to do it with only 20% of what God has given for the job.

Definition of Unity of the Faith

Since this is the first objective of coming into collective maturity, it is important to understand exactly what this means. In practice, we have interpreted this to mean "unity of doctrine", which is certainly not its meaning. The practical definition of "doctrine" is a formalized statement of belief concerning particular religious subjects. Doctrine quickly becomes dogmatic tradition to be preserved. What we have failed to realize is that our doctrine is based on our understanding and, over time, we should grow in understanding, which means that our doctrine should be re-

evaluated periodically from the viewpoint of our current understanding. However, once it is formalized and becomes tradition handed down to converts to preserve our religious heritage, it becomes a problem and a hindrance to coming into knowledge and understanding of the commands of God.

We forget that doctrine is the logic of the precepts of men and not the Word of God. When we start thinking of our doctrine as more important than what the Word says, we begin to teach doctrine instead of the Word. We begin to love doctrine more than the Word. We begin to fellowship only with those who agree with our doctrine. We begin to build churches, denominations, universities around the preservation and proclamation of our doctrine. We move away from being God and Word centered to being doctrine centered. That is NOT what “unity of the faith” is.

Since unity of the faith is not something that most of us have correctly thought about, we need to build a foundation about this so that our understanding is clear. That involves defining what it is not as shown above and comparing it and contrasting it with other things to show what it is.

Some have thought that unity of the spirit and unity of the faith are the same thing; but, the Scriptures clearly show that this is not true. We are told that we must be “diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” [*Ephesians 4:3*] We don't create this unity; it exists as a spiritual reality. We do, however, have to preserve it. But the unity of the faith is something to which we must attain. [*Ephesians 4:13*] It is a goal toward which we work. And, since it is in the context of corporate functions, it is a corporate goal rather than an individual one.

Doing this will cause us to have to deal with our traditions and doctrines. We don't want to be like the Pharisees.

Mark 7:6-9 NASB

(6) And He said to them, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.

(7) 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.'

(8) "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men."

(9) He was also saying to them, "You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition."

However, aren't we just as guilty? If you don't think so, just ask any Church of Christ minister if there are apostles or prophets today; or ask any Baptist minister if speaking in tongues is valid for today. They will answer according to their tradition, even if you point out that it is in conflict with the Scriptures.

So, exactly what is “unity of the faith”. If we break it down, the two key words are “unity” and “faith”. The meaning of unity is straight forward—coming into one purpose, agreement, oneness. Faith may give us a little more problem because we have all heard various definitions of faith and believe that we know what it is. Faith is part of spiritual reality [*Hebrews 11:1*] that we can touch; however, that is not the type of faith that is meant by “unity of the faith”. The essence of this type of faith is given to us in Hebrews.

Hebrews 11:6 NASB

(6) And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

This type of faith pleases God and has two aspects to it—believing that God is and believing that He rewards those that seek Him. Just believing the first part—that God is—is not enough for even the devils believe that God is and they tremble at His name. [*James 2:19*] Real faith involves seeking God and seeing the value in doing so. The key is the object of this type of faith.

John 17:21-23 NASB

(21) 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.

(22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

(23) I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

This is the working definition of unity, being one just as our Lord and the Father are one. Unity is perfected when Jesus is in us and the Father is in Jesus. This is the same type of unity that exists within the Godhead and God intends that we reflect and live in that same unity. This is true fellowship, which is the goal of our walk with the Lord.

1 John 1:3 NASB

(3) what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Our witness of Jesus is to bring others into true fellowship with us and, by extension, with the Father and the Son. This is the essence of the unity of the faith.

The Work of God

As a goal toward which we are all working makes the unity of faith a part of the work of God. The question is, "how do we do the work of God?" This question has been asked before. We should look at Jesus' answer.

John 6:28-29 NASB

(28) Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we do, so that we may work the works of God?"

(29) Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent."

Jesus gave us this definition of the work of God and it is the only one given in the Scriptures—we are to believe in Him whom God has sent. There are two that have been sent to us by God. The first is Jesus and we are to believe in Him—believe that He fulfilled His mission and accomplished all that the Father intended and that we have reaped the results, the benefits of His obedience to the Father's will. The second one sent is the Holy Spirit, the promise of the Father whom Jesus said that He would send to us [*John 15:26*]. We are to believe in Him, also.

We must believe that the Holy Spirit will fulfill His mission also. His job includes testifying of Jesus, leading us into Truth, showing us things to come, receiving from Jesus and showing it to us and many other things as detailed in the Scriptures. Part of His work is to bring to completion the intention of the Father for the close of the ages.

The Holy Spirit administers all that belongs to Jesus. He works through the ascension gifts of Jesus to accomplish the objectives of the Lord. We must come into a unity of the faith that believes that the Holy Spirit is capable and able to complete the work of God. He knows what He is doing.

We come into a unity of the faith when we yield our ability and vision to that of the Holy Spirit. All who can do that have a unity of belief that the Holy Spirit has the purpose, plan and pattern for all that God is doing and He is pursuing the completion of that plan. We have faith that He is able to actually accomplish it without our help. The first step toward corporate maturity is yielding to the Holy Spirit to do the work. We enter into His rest.

Unity of Purpose

The purpose of God is the only basis for the unity of the faith. Our problem is that we substitute self-originated purposes, even good ones, for the purpose of God and we unite around the man made purpose rather than God's. These tend to be problems that need answers—we see a need and seek to find others that will unite to meet that need or solve that problem.

A good example of this is the mixed multitude that left Egypt [*Exodus 12:38*] with the children of Israel when God delivered them from their oppressors. This same mixed multitude created additional problems for the Israelites in the desert when they lusted after meat after becoming dissatisfied with manna, which also caused the Israelites to become dissatisfied with God's provision. [*Numbers 11:4*]

The mixed multitude were rabble not Israelites. They saw a lot of activity when the Israelites left Egypt and, since they didn't have anything in Egypt that was promising, they followed the Israelites without being an heir of the promise. It is one thing to be united in the problem—getting out of Egypt and a bad situation, and quite another thing to be united in the promise and the provision.

The mixed multitude did not have a stake in the promised land; they just wanted to better their position. They wanted to make their lives better, easier, richer—their only concern was for their own self interest. When the going got rough, they were the first to complain, causing others to follow suit. They became a hindrance to the Israelites by diverting their attention from the purpose of God, even casting doubt on His motives for bringing them out into the wilderness.

We have a similar problem today with a mixed multitude of believers who are united in their own betterment and self interest without any unity regarding the plan and purpose of God. We need a paradigm shift from our own purposes to the purpose of God; a move toward the unity of the faith.

This shift can only be made as the Holy Spirit opens our understanding and we allow the ascension gifts of Jesus, the five fold ministry, to begin to function to build the corporate Body of Christ so that we can mature corporately—fully representing Jesus in the earth.

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