

# HURDLES IN ACHIEVING UNITY

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

**(John 17:20-23)**

# DIFFICULT-TO-UNDERSTAND PASSAGES

*"Count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures."*

**(2 Pet. 3:15-16, ESV)**

**God sometimes requires extra effort on our part to understand His word.**

- **Matt. 13:10-15** shows this as well, while also illustrating:
  - I. God can intentionally make learning the truth difficult because He wants a person to love Him enough to show diligence in study.
  - II. If we do not have a fervent desire to know the truth, we will not understand.
- We must love God and love the truth enough that we are willing to spend time and effort studying those difficult passages **(see Psalm 119:9-11; Josh. 1:8)**.
- We must *"be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* **(2 Tim. 2:15)**.

**A lack of desire to understand difficult passages prevents unity.**

# DIFFICULT-TO-ACCEPT COMMANDS

*"But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:22-25).*

- Once we understand what God expects from us, we must then be willing to accept and obey what is commanded (see **John 13:17**).

## **God expects a full commitment.**

- *... he who is able to accept it, let him accept it (see Matt. 19:11-12).*
  - It's easy to obey God when it doesn't cost us anything; are we willing to obey Him when the cost is high?
  - Don't be deceived. The cost of discipleship is incredibly high (see **Luke 14:27-33**).
- If we, as individuals, are not willing to pay the daily cost of discipleship, true biblical unity will never happen within a congregation (see **Eph. 4:1-5, 11-16, 17-23**).

**Unity in obedience is just as vital as unity in faith and doctrine!**

# RELYING ON CONSCIENCE RATHER THAN TRUTH

*"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).*

- When it comes to passages in the Bible that are either difficult to understand or put into practice, many Christians choose to "**agree to disagree.**" Some will arrive at a conclusion of, "**You do whatever your conscience tells you.**"
- Although possessing the right kind of heart and having sincerity in our faith is vital (**see 1 Tim. 1:19 and Rom. 14**), being sincere and following our consciences does not automatically mean we are abiding in the doctrine of Christ (**see 1 Cor. 4:4; Prov. 14:12**).
- Instead, we must "*observe [do, DTS] all things that Christ has commanded*" (**Matt. 28:20**), striving to align our consciences with every word the New Testament provides.
- Not violating our conscience is vital to serving God faithfully (**see Rom. 14:22; 1 Tim. 1:5**). However, unless our consciences are directly informed by and patterned in accordance with God's Word, we are no different than Paul before his conversion - sincerely wrong (**see Acts 23:1**).

**An uninformed or ill-informed conscience is a barrier preventing true biblical unity.**

# IGNORING OUR DIFFERENCES

**Unity does not happen unless we recognize and work through our differences!**

- Adherence to the truth and taking proper stands for the truth will cause divisions.
  - *“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law” (Luke 12:51-53).*
- Wherever Jesus went, division followed.
  - *... So there was a division among the people because of Him (John 7:40-43).*
  - *... And there was a division among them (John 9:16).*
  - *... There was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings (John 10:19).*
- The first century church was no stranger to division.
  - Division over doctrine (Acts 15:1-21).
  - Division over John Mark (Acts 15:36-41).

# IGNORING OUR DIFFERENCES

**Unity does not happen unless we recognize and work through our differences!**

- We do not seek division, but when divisions occur, true disciples of Christ are made evident (**see 1 Cor. 11:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:15**).
  - If we desire unity as we ought, it must be unity in the truth, not in something that creates a false image of unity.
    - This requires us actually discussing and not ignoring differences we may have!
    - It is rather difficult to "*be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment*" (**1 Cor. 1:10**) when we do not openly discuss our differences.
    - We should always be ready and willing to "*contend earnestly for the faith*" (**Jude 3**).
- NOTE: Jude 3 discusses a responsibility of every individual Christian, not just preachers and teachers.**
- The Bible tells us that the first century Christians "*were of one heart*" (**Acts 4:32**). How can we possibly be of one heart today if we choose to ignore our differences as it pertains to Bible matters and truth?

**We should always be willing to contend for the faith, and not just with members of false churches!**

# “SHOOTING THE MESSENGER”

*"Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16).*

- When a fellow Christian speaks up and voices his difference in opinion, unfortunately, the messenger can get “shot.”
  - This can happen over doctrinal issues (see Gal. 4:12-16).
  - And it can happen over moral issues (see Acts 7:51-60).
- Christians usually won't physically act out against another Christian, but they will choose to stop their ears and ignore sound teaching, thus heaping up for themselves teachers to suit their own desires (see 2 Tim. 4:3-4).
- Instead of being like the Galatians when Paul called out their errant doctrine and instead of being like those who murdered Stephen after being rebuked for their sins, when a person loves us enough to tell us our wrongs today, we should be like David when Nathan confronted him about his sinful affair with Bathsheba (see 2 Sam. 12:7, 13; Psalm 51).

When a person “shoots the messenger,” both his soul and the unity of the church is at stake.

# OVERCOMING HURDLES IN ACHIEVING TRUE BIBLICAL UNITY

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

(John 17:20-23)

If there is to be true biblical unity within the church, we must. . .

- humble ourselves beneath God’s word in order to both understand and obey it,
- recognize conscience is not our sole guide (don’t use conscience as a crutch!),
- be willing to speak up when we disagree with a brother/sister, as well as listen when our brother/sister disagrees with us,
- and not “shoot the messenger” if disagreement is ever voiced or if a rebuke is made.

**It takes constant individual self-examination to both achieve and maintain collective unity.**