

United In Christ

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Topical Bible Studies

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May you allow God to guide you in your study of His Holy Word, the Bible.



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Lesson 1

Jesus – The Person

The environment in which Jesus was born was a closed society, a people who considered themselves superior to all other people. They took great pride in being the Children of Abraham, God's chosen people. 'Abraham is our father' (John 8:38). They had an immense hatred of the Samaritans as they considered them to be half-breeds, Jews who had forsaken the Law of Moses during the period of Babylonian captivity. Their hatred was so great they would go out of their way to keep from setting foot in the land of the Samaritans. Roman occupiers were no different and any Jew who associated with "those occupiers" was a "sinner;" e.g., Matthew, the tax collector.

The Jews were also legalistic to the highest degree. In order to earn God's promises they believed they must fulfill the letter of the law, not necessarily the intent. For instance, Moses required them to tithe and give a tenth. To make certain they gave the tenth but no more, they counted the seeds of plants to give a tenth and only a tenth.

Rome required the Jews to carry a soldier's load for one mile. So the Jews put down markers to make sure they went no farther. Remember Jesus stated that if someone forced you to go one mile; go with him two (Matthew 5:41).

Into this culture came the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ. The Jews believed that when the Messiah came He would restore the earthly kingdom of Israel to its 'God-given right' to power and honor. Their Messiah would be the King of the Jews and rule like David.

Jesus often addressed the arrogant, self-centered, and self-righteous Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Jews. On one occasion Jesus stated that He has sheep in other locations. Thus, it would appear Jesus was referring to the Gentiles, all non-Jews.

In John 10 Jesus stated "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep [those who chose to be His] and my sheep know me [have an intimate relationship with Him] — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be **one flock and one shepherd**" (John 10:14-16).

It is stated in Isaiah 56:7-8 "... my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, 'I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered' [undoubtedly a prophesy regarding the despised Samaritans and even the heathen Gentiles]."

With this attitude of superiority, could the Jewish people and their religious leaders possibly understand or even have a hint of what Jesus was teaching? Apparently, some degree of superiority prevailed even among His closest disciples. John and the other disciples could not consider the possibility of Jesus having other followers outside their clique, sect or small knit group.

"'Master,' said John, 'we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is **not one of us.**' 'Do not stop him,' Jesus said, 'for whoever is not against you is for you.'" (Luke 9:49-50)

But not everyone who does things in Jesus' name is for him, for Jesus stated in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness' [evildoers]!"

Knowing that His mission was to be **the sacrifice for the sins** of all people – Jews, Greeks, Romans, and those despised Samaritans - Jesus prayed:

"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that

you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. ... Sanctify [consecrate, make holy] them by the truth; your word is truth. ... "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [Good News], that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also **be in us** so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. **May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me**" (John 17:6-10; 17; 20-23).

Questions

1. Jesus was born into a culture of perceived superiority and hatred of all peoples not of their religion and race.
 True
 False
2. Jesus as a descendant of David came to restore Israel to a world power.
 True
 False
3. Jesus' mission was to provide a way that all people Jew, Samaritan and Gentile could be reconciled unto God.
 True
 False
4. Only those who do the will of God will enter Heaven.
 True
 False
5. Jesus prayed for those who believed in Him and obeyed through the Good News, the Gospel, would be one, united.
 True
 False

Lesson 2

The Oneness of the First Christians

Following Pentecost, Christians were one in Christ, undoubtedly the unity mentioned in Christ's prayer in John 17.

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power, the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need" (Acts 4:32-35).

Later after many other Jews believed and obeyed, we see they were still united in love for one another:

"All the believers were together and had everything in common [They were united as one in Christ and in Fellowship with God and man]. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need [love of brethren]. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together [breaking bread] with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people" (Acts 2:44-47).

But it would not always be this way. For in a short time, perhaps within weeks or months, unity began to fade as the Grecian Christian widows (Jews) were ignored. They may have been Jews but not from Judah, not Hebrew-speaking Jews:

“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1).

Unity among people of diverse backgrounds is difficult to achieve and maintain. Most people tend to want to associate with others when there is something in common; e.g., ethnicity, political or religious belief, wealth, power or position in society. In Corinth unity waned and division occurred when the common bond ceased to be Christ.

“My brothers, some members of Chloe's family have made it clear to me that there are quarrels among you. This is what I mean: Each of you is saying, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to the Messiah." Is the Messiah divided? Paul wasn't crucified for you, was he? You weren't baptized in Paul's name, were you” (1 Corinthians 1:11-13)?

Unity for those in Christ must be based upon Christ, His death, burial and resurrection. Unity cannot be achieved on opinions and interpretations.

Questions

1. Immediately following Pentecost all Christians were of one heart and mind being united in Christ.
 True
 False
2. Their Christian love was displayed in fellowship, sharing with the needy, eating together, and in prayer.
 True
 False
3. After a period of time the Grecian, non-Hebrew Jews, especially widows were treated with less respect.
 True
 False
4. The Corinthian Christians were divided when their focus shifted away from Christ to the person who taught them.
 True
 False
5. Unity is in Christ - His death burial and resurrection.
 True
 False

Lesson 3

Unity with Differences of Interpretation

Go back to AD 76 and consider a teaching opportunity you experienced. You began a 6-month Bible study. Over a hundred prospective students show up most were just curious but 25 sign up for the class. They were from all walks of life. Should any of these be excluded from studying to know God and His will?

Thief	Swindler
Murderer	Miser (greedy and covetous)
Prostitute	Foul mouthed person
Liar	Dead beat (owes everyone)
Drug addict	Dishonest tax collector
Drunkard	Divorced and remarried
Homosexual	Living together but not married
Roman soldier	Pagan priest

Gossip	Sorcerer
Slanderer	Blasphemer
Rapists	Atheist
Slave trader	Jew

As their teacher you knew:

- The gospel message to be taught
- Action one must take for God to put them in Christ and His Church
- What it means to be united and committed to Christ

By the end of the study, all had given themselves over to Christ and were added to His Body. Are they in fellowship with Christ, each other, and the other Christians? YES!

After a few years, one of the students desired to renew the fellowship, he had experienced during the six months of study and scheduled a reunion. They requested you address the gathering. As you might expect some could not attend. One had died and another had been put to death by Roman authorities. There was the issue of fellowship due to various understandings of the issues listed below.

- I. One had returned to his former homosexual- way of life
- II. One reported he had taught his brother who was so disabled they did not think he could be immersed so they poured water over him calling it baptism.
- III. Two had come to the conclusion that holy hands must be raised unto God when praying.
- IV. One divorced his wife even though she had not done anything to break the marriage covenant.
- V. One thought it unnecessary to assemble with the Body of Christ due to the possibility of persecution.
- VI. Several assemblies took the Lord's Supper during the week in addition to Sundays.

Are they all still united in Christ and in their fellowship with each other? Are any of their actions based on personal interpretations binding on others in the Body of Christ or are they just a diversity of opinion? How can such a diverse group remain united?

Unity can be achieved on facts but not teachings of one's opinions or interpretations. Teachings are not facts as facts are things that have occurred. Teachings are interpretations of an understanding. The apostles' instructions were inspired - man's teachings are not. In man's attempt to understand the teachings of the Bible he forms an interpretation based upon his intellectual ability, knowledge and ambition.

Paul warned the Ephesian elders, watchmen of the flock guarding against wolves [men teaching contrary to the inspired instructions] intent on the destruction of the flock, within the close-knit community of believers would begin to draw people unto themselves not Christ and His Body of believers.

"Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you [as if or pretending to be Christians] and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number [elders] men will arise and distort the truth [by teaching their interpretations] in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard [stand your watch as a good sentential]!" (Acts 20:28-31)

Paul also instructed Titus "For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party [Jews]. They must be silenced since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach" (Titus 1:10-11).

Peter issued a warning to all Christians

"There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They [spiritual wolves with their personal interpretations] will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign

Lord who bought them [probably the Gnostic belief that Jesus was not human but a phantom therefore nullifying His atoning sacrifice] — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these [desire for money, power and prestige] teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up [their own interpretations]” (2 Peter 2:1-3).

Questions

1. There will be false teachers who teach for personal gain.
 - True
 - False
2. Unity among Christians can be achieved on opinion and interpretation.
 - True
 - False
3. Some people teach for the money they can receive not from their conviction that Christ is the way unto eternal life.
 - True
 - False
4. Shepherds are to know the Word and to guard the flock of Christians against the teachings of false teachers, “wolves”.
 - True
 - False
5. The apostles’ teachings are inspired but personal opinions and interpretations of their teachings are not.
 - True
 - False

Lesson 4

Methods used in Interpreting Scriptures.

Facts such as the death, burial and resurrection can be readily accepted but Christians need to know how to properly interpret scripture regarding beliefs, practices and procedures. The following are some methods used:

Specificity [a command]

Any action specified excludes all other actions.

Silence

When the Bible is silent about a subject it neither requires nor prohibits an action. Therefore, it allows one to make all reasonable and responsible interpretations and inferences, which vary by one’s knowledge and intellectual abilities. Thus, different opinions may exist among those in Christ even within the same congregation. However, one’s opinion must not be forced upon another. They must remain his private interpretations.

Necessary Inference

An inference requires judgment. A necessary inference establishes an interpretation of a practice or procedure equivalent to a command of Christ and requires Christians everywhere and at all times to comply. The question then becomes who is authorized to decide for others what inference is necessary.

Inferences

An inference is one’s personal interpretation conclusion about a teaching not a command.

Expediency

Procedures or practices not explicitly enjoined or prohibited by the biblical text are considered permissible in the execution of some clear biblical command.

Example

Examples in the Bible show actions of an individual or an assembly of Christians generally confined to one location rather than universal practice. Some examples were contrary to a specific inspired teaching.

Christians should use the following procedure to interpret the scriptures not quarrel over word meanings:

- a. Examine all scripture relating to the procedure or practice.
- b. Determine if the belief, procedure, or practice is **specified**. If so, then all other belief, procedure, or practice relating to it is excluded. For instance, God specified the type of wood to be used in the construction of the ark. So, all other wood was excluded. God was not silent. He was specific.
- c. If nothing is mentioned about the subject [**Bible is silent**] then reasonable and responsible options are available. For instance, Paul could choose to sail, walk or ride to Macedonia. He chose to sail.
- d. Analyze examples to determine if they agree with or explain something specified.
 - i. If it does, it is not the example that **must** be followed but the command.
 - ii. If it does not relate to or explain a command, individuals or congregations have an option whether to follow or refrain from following the example. For instance, assembling on Solomon's colonnade.
- e. Christians must not quarrel over words and their interpretations.
- f. With an understanding of methods used to interpret scripture one can answer the questions about fellowship of the class of 76. For instance, the English word visit when the King James Bible was translated meant -go to someone to determine if they were in need. If so, take care of their needs. It is not today's meaning of having someone over for a meal and fellowship.

Conclusion

If something is specified, then all Christians everywhere, at all times and in various cultures and societies must comply. God has spoken. Man must obey. If something is not specified then reasonable and responsible judgments are allowed but not binding upon others.

Questions

1. Bible silence on a teaching neither requires nor prohibits an action.
 True
 False
2. Expediency is an unrequired practice used to accomplish a clear biblical command.
 True
 False
3. All New Testament examples must to be followed.
 True
 False
4. Something specified is required of Christians in all cultures and societies at all times.
 True
 False

5. Something not specified allows private interpretations with reasonable and responsible judgments that do not contradict other biblical teachings.
- True
 - False

Lesson 5

The Gospel

When one refers to the Gospel to what is he referring?

- a. The four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
- b. The entire New Testament
- c. The Bible both the Old and New Testaments

The gospel is the Good News that God came to earth in a body of flesh the same as that of man, offering His sinless life as the only acceptable sacrifice to the Father for the forgiveness of man's sins. Thus, the **Gospel was and is Jesus' life, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension - the atoning sacrifice – a verifiable historical fact.**

The **gospel is not** a theory, a doctrine, a system of moral or spiritual philosophy, not even **the theory** of faith, repentance, baptism, remission of sins, adoption, the Holy Spirit, and eternal life.

The **gospel then is the good news** Jesus expected His apostles to teach when He told them to "Go into all the world and preach [proclaim] the gospel" (Mark 16:16). It is what Paul preached when he preached 'Christ crucified' (1 Corinthians 1).

The Church Christ established on earth is essentially, intentionally and constitutionally one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him in all things by **repentance and obedience of the gospel.**

Christians of every generation by constant study grow and mature in their knowledge and understanding of God's will resulting in the abandoning of some earlier interpretations, misunderstandings, and beliefs they have been previously taught.

Doctrines, creeds, dogmas, and interpretations all prevent unity since unity is achievable on Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, not beliefs and teachings.

Questions

1. The gospel is
 - Jesus' and the apostles' teaching
 - Jesus' direct commands and promises
 - Christ and His atoning sacrifice for forgiveness of sins
2. Faith, repentance, and obedience to the gospel allows God to put one into Christ.
 - True
 - False
3. The church Christ established on earth is an organism, a body of people, not an organization or building.
 - True
 - False

4. Christians by constant study will grow and mature in their knowledge and understanding of the will of God which results in their abandoning previous teachings, opinions, interpretations and misunderstandings.
 - True
 - False
5. Opinions and interpretations forced upon others cause divisions and prevent unity.
 - True
 - False

Lesson 6

Doctrine / Teachings

Paul stated in 1 Timothy 6:2b-4 “Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine [teaching] and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” Thus, the apostles’ proclaimed the Good News [salvation] **and** how to grow into the likeness of God by living sacrificial lives. Their teachings (doctrines) explain how Christians are to live acceptable to God.

Sound Doctrine - teaching leading to godliness

“He [sentinels, watchmen, elders, overseers] must **hold firmly** to the trustworthy message [the Gospel of Christ] as it has been taught, so that he can **encourage** others [**able to give instruction**] by sound doctrine [faithful and true teachings of the God’s message] and refute those who oppose it.” (Titus 1:9)

Titus 2:1-10 – “You, Titus, must **teach** what is in accord with **sound doctrine.**” [Paul then lists what Titus must teach.

Teach - the older men to be

- Temperate, sober-minded
- Worthy of respect, dignified, reverent
- Self-controlled, temperate
- Sound in faith and love
- Endurance, patience

Teach - the older women to

- Be reverent in the way they live - reverent in behavior
- Not to be slanderers, gossipers
- Not to be addicted to much wine - slaves to much wine
- Teach what is good.
- Train the younger women to:
 - love their husbands and children
 - be self-controlled and pure, discreet, chaste
 - be busy - working at home
 - be kind, good
 - be respectful to their husbands -that no one will malign the word. [Don’t knowingly do things he disapproves of.]

Encourage young men to

- be self-controlled, sober-minded
- be a model, set an example, of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, seriousness

- sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.

Teach slaves to

- be subject to their masters in everything
- try to please them
- not talk back to them
- not steal - pilfer from them
- be fully trusted so the teaching about our Savior is attractive.

Paul instructed Timothy “Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved. Teach and urge these things.” (1 Timothy 6:1-3)

Christian actions must display God’s nature so that the name of God will not be reviled. This principle applies to relationships with employers and others in authority.

Unsound Doctrine (teaching leading to unrighteousness)

“Anyone who **teaches something different** [from what Paul discussed in earlier chapters] is arrogant [I have all the right answers. You must agree with me] and lacks understanding. Such a person has an unhealthy desire to quibble over the meaning of words. This stirs up arguments ending in jealousy, division, slander, and evil suspicions. These people always cause trouble. Their minds are corrupt, and they have turned their backs on the truth. To them, a show of godliness is just a way to become wealthy. Some people may contradict our teaching, but these are the wholesome teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. These teachings promote a godly life.” (1 Timothy 6:3-5)

1 Timothy 1:8-11 Paul lists things contrary to sound teachings “Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully [properly] understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane [irreligious, irreverent], for those who strike [Greek word *patroloas* kill] their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.”

2 Peter 2:1- “But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These **false teachers** will infiltrate your midst [your circle of associates, your fellowship] with destructive heresies, [self-chosen interpretation binding upon others not emanating from God] resulting in a party or sect even to the point of denying the Master who bought them.”

Romans 1:18-21...28-32 – “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. ... Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God [see fit to acknowledge God], he gave them over to a depraved mind (debased), to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue [practice] to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

Questions

1. The gospel is about salvation whereas sound teaching is about how to live acceptably before God.

- True
 - False
2. Those who teach that their opinions and interpretations must be followed to be in fellowship stir up arguments that result in division.
- True
 - False
3. The unholy and profane, irreligious, irreverent, those who strike their fathers and mothers, murderers, sexually immoral, those who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, and perjurers are actions contrary to sound teaching.
- True
 - False
4. False teachers including church shepherds, elders, sentinels are those who teach things that do not emanate from God.
- True
 - False
5. God's wrath is upon those who are full of envy, strife deceit, and malice.
- True
 - False

Lesson 7

Difference in Gospel and Doctrine

The teachings of Christ and His apostles are not the gospel but an inspired explanation of the Gospel and how those in Christ are to live, grow and mature into God's nature, His likeness. Their teachings are not things that happened, which are facts, but inspired statements that can be discussed and interpreted with conclusions and inferences which may vary by one's knowledge and intellect. Individual interpretations are private and not binding upon others.

Perhaps the following example will help clarify the difference between fact and opinion.

Two vehicles collide at an intersection. There were two witnesses one behind each vehicle. Witness A, behind vehicle A, said the light was green therefore vehicle B ran the traffic light. Witness B, behind vehicle B, said the light was green therefore vehicle A ran the traffic light.

What are the facts and interpretations or inferences?

Facts

1. There were two vehicles
2. There was an accident
3. There were two witnesses
4. There was a traffic light

Interpretations and Inferences

1. Witness A believed the light to be green for vehicle A and inferred the traffic light must have been red for vehicle B.
2. Witness B believed the light to be green for vehicle B and inferred the traffic light must have been red for vehicle A.

By concluding their belief and inference was right and then demanding that there is no other possible conclusion, their interpretation and inference became their necessary inference.

Conclusion

1. There is no dispute about the four facts.
2. Possibilities about their statements and inferences.
 - a. One is wrong and the other is right.
 - b. Both are correct - the traffic light was green on both sides.
 - c. Neither one is correct. The light was not functioning.

Observe and consider Revelation 21:8 “But for the fearful, and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their part *shall be* in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death.” This emphatic statement appears to leave no room for interpretation. But

1. Who is the liar? One with an un-repented lie **or** one who makes it a practice of lying?
2. Who is a murderer? One who kills another **or** one who practices killing within his heart?
3. Who are the fornicators? One who has had sexual relations with someone other than his or her spouse **or** one who practices fornication?

The interpretation of liar, murderer, and fornicator does not alter the emphatic statement of Revelation 21. But anyone who demands that everyone follow his interpretation of who are the liars, murderers, and fornicators is divisive. Romans 1:32 “although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue [Greek *prássontes* Strong's meaning practices continually] to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.”

God knows the heart and will judge justly regardless of man's opinions. Man cannot decide who is in fellowship with God and His Children based upon his personal opinion and interpretation. Man can judge another's actions but, God determines those in fellowship with Him.

It is a most serious offense for anyone, especially one who is perceived to be a leader or authority figure to leave the impression that his opinion is not subject to challenge.

Since the gospel is a fact, that is; Christ offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice and since the apostles' teachings are inspired truths, the distinction between the two will be clarified in the following five points.

1. The gospel message is a proclamation of the Gospel fact that one accepts or rejects. Thus, a belief in the one fact (Christ is Lord) and obedience to Him through repentance and to the one act (baptism into Christ's death) is the basis of unity.
2. The teachings of the apostles are not facts, as the gospel is, but [inspired] interpretations and implications based upon the gospel.
3. The doctrine [teachings of the apostles] allows for debate and dialogue [discussion], for intellectual stimulation and the stretching of the mind. It matures those in Christ, but in such a way that each man develops according to his own uniqueness.
4. Differences regarding doctrine may at times place strain upon fellowship but it is a tragic error to suppose that unanimity of doctrine, teaching, is the basis of fellowship.
5. The New Testament scriptures cannot be the basis of unity. It is in them that Christ is revealed. The good news, the gospel, is the basis of unity. Adapted from Alexander Campbell

Questions

1. The crucifixion of Christ, Jesus' sin offering, is a verifiable fact.
 True
 False
2. The apostles' teachings are not things that happened, which are facts, but inspired statements that can be discussed and interpreted with conclusions and inferences.
 True
 False
3. The continued practice of sin results in eternal death.
 True
 False
4. The opinion of church leaders be they pastors, preachers, elders, priest or pope is not subject to challenge.
 True
 False
5. The gospel of Christ is Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, a fact that can be either accepted or rejected whereas the apostles' teachings are inspired interpretations that can be debated and discussed.
 True
 False

Lesson 8

Forbearance

There must be forbearance, tolerance, mercy, longsuffering and patience in doctrine (teaching) and opinion **but NOT the gospel** as the Gospel is the way unto salvation. The inspired apostles' doctrine is the way unto godly living as they proclaim the Good News to "all the world." Christians are to never cease evangelizing.

- Forbearance does not require one to surrender any truth.
- Private or personal opinions should be expressed openly for discussion but never made a test of fellowship.
- Unity is achievable only upon the basis of belief that Jesus is the Christ and obedience to His gospel - His death, burial and resurrection – by immersion into His death.
- Christians can differ about a lot of things and still be one.
- When one in Christ abandons Christ and ceases to trust in Him. He is no longer in fellowship with Christ.
- Demanding a personal opinion be made a test of fellowship causes strife and division.

In expressing their opinion(s) some Christians, whether unintentional or intentional, appear to cast doubts about the honesty and integrity of those with whom they differ. Statements such as 'my belief is straight from of the Bible' or 'the Bible states' implying the other person's opinion is not and indicates an attitude of superiority of knowledge and understanding. They consider their opinion as 'scriptural' and their brother's not. These statements leave the impression that their brother is ignorant, not spiritual or a false teacher. It is equivalent to 'speaking evil of'. This ought not to be. It does not display God's love. All in Christ are his servants and his priests to serve God. No one is more important than another because of intellect, knowledge, understanding or oratory ability. Love of brethren must prevail.

Questions

1. Forbearance does not require the surrender of any truth.
 True

- False
- 2. Personal opinions must never be a test of fellowship.
 - True
 - False
- 3. Unity can be achieved on the belief in the fact that Jesus is the Christ and obedience to the one act of immersion.
 - True
 - False
- 4. Christians can have different opinions about many teachings, but not about Christ and His atoning sacrifice, and still be one in Christ.
 - True
 - False
- 5. Expressing one's personal opinion that displays an attitude of your superiority and your brother's inferiority does not display God's love.
 - True
 - False

Lesson 9

In Christ and In Fellowship with One Another

"I delivered to you as of **first importance** what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3-5). Note – to the Jews "according to the scripture" meant the Tanaka or Old Testament.

On Pentecost Day "those who received his word were baptized (immersed), and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed [committed to Christ] were together and had all things in common." (Acts 2:41-44)

Those who repented of their rejection of Jesus as the Son of God, the Messiah, the Christ, and were immersed into Christ's death were added to Christ's Body by God having been cleansed of their sins. Therefore, they were united with Christ and continued steadfastly in the apostles' teachings before any epistles had been written. The Apostles' doctrine, teaching, did not add anything to the facts of the Good News, Christ's death and resurrection. Their inspired teachings were in both general and specific terms. Thus, the apostles' teachings taught Christians how to live for Christ, grow, and mature into the likeness of God; e.g., love, merciful, patient, kind, truthful, just, and others.

"...He reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and without blemish [sins were removed] and unreprouvable before him: **IF** so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel." (Colossians 1:22-23)

"Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized **into** [union with] Christ Jesus were baptized **into** his death? **We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death**, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if **we have been united with him in a death** like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his." (Romans 6:3-5)

"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?" (2 Corinthians 6:14)

“If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.” (1 John 1:6-10)

“My [Christ] prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message [the Good News], that **all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us **so that the world may believe that you have sent me.**” (John 17:20-21)

Jesus stated in Matthew 7:1 that a disciple is not to judge his brother. So, if one refuses to fellowship another because of differences in interpreting of some non-specific instruction, is he walking in the light? If he is not, how can Christ’s blood continue to cleanse him? For the apostle John stated in 1 John 1:7 “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another [not just those who agree with us and our understanding], and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Only Christ brings unity. He is the Good News. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus, the Christ! One is “united with Christ in His death” thus Unity is in Christ – the person.

“If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates [detest, love less] his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20)

Jesus’ purpose for coming to earth was to:

- live among men without sin
- be the atoning sacrifice to remove sin from man
- die with our sins placed upon Him
- remove sin through trust and obedience when one
 - Dies to sin
 - Is buried into Christ’s death leaving their sins with those placed on Christ at the cross
 - Is raised a new spiritual creation by God free of past sins
 - Is put by God into Christ’s body, His Church, Kingdom of God on earth
 - Does, out of love not of duty or command, God’s will of evangelizing, encouraging and performing good works.

Questions

1. The first Christians were in fellowship because
 - They were all Jews
 - They were all from the same country
 - They had Christ and all things in common
2. The 3,000 reconciled on Pentecost would be presented to God holy and without blemish IF they
 - Remained in Jerusalem
 - Remained loyal to the law of Moses
 - Continued faithful to Christ and His teachings
3. Christians are united with Christ
 - when they acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God
 - When they cease living a rebellious life
 - in His death following their baptism by immersion
4. Fellowship with God and those in Christ requires faithfulness to Christ and His teachings

True

False

5. One cannot love God and not love all others in Christ, their brothers

True

False

Lesson 10

Re-United with Christ

The Apostle Paul stated that all mankind suffers from the sin problem stating: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation [atonement] by his blood, to be received by faith” (Romans 3:23-24).

All of us are faced with some type of sin that, if not cleansed by the blood of Christ, will separate us from our Lord and Savior. James expressed our problem of yielding to temptation stating “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (James 1:13-15).

Then a little later he wrote: “... the end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:21-23)

When a Christian yields to temptation and returns to their former sinful way of life and later desires to be reconciled to God, what action does God require of him? Does God require penance, physical punishment, some financial penalty, or baptism again? Does the Bible proscribe a restoration course of action to be followed by the wayward Christian and for the local assembly of Christians when one is reconciled and re-united with Christ?

The reconciling process must begin with the recognition of one’s state of rebellion and with a desire to be forgiven and reconciled to God. But desire alone is not enough; there must be a change in attitude, heart, mind, and inner being. They must communicate their desire to be forgiven and restored to the one(s) to whom they seek reconciliation - God and man. The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32 appears to explain this process. God is always open to repentance and reconciliation. However, this is not necessarily true with all who claim to be in Christ even though they are to forgive as Christ forgave them.

God’s children through the ages have had the sin problem. The Children of Israel, the race God chose to bring Christ, the Messiah, into the world were constantly rebelling against him thus committing spiritual adultery by worshipping the idol gods of the nations near them, thereby breaking their covenant relationship with Him. But every time they repented of their sins, by tearing down their idols of false gods and returning to Jehovah with a penitent and contrite heart, God forgave.

David, a man after God’s own heart, is an example of an individual sinning against both God and man when he committed adultery and then murder in an attempt to cover up his sin. When the prophet Nathan confronted David, David’s heart, his inner being, was filled with grief, his attitude changed stating “I have sinned against the Lord.” He returned and repented. God forgave.

Demas was a companion of Paul’s on one of his missionary trips as he sent his regards to the Colossian church (Colossians 4:14). Later Paul stated “Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted [forsaken; abandoned] me” (2 Timothy 4:10). The Bible is silent regarding Demas’ final spiritual situation.

Simon, the sorcerer (magician) of Samaria attempted to purchase God's gift. Peter forcefully explained his sinful situation to him stating; "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me" (Acts 8:20-24).

In 1 Corinthians 5 we read of a Christian brother involved in a sexually immoral situation not even tolerated by the pagan Gentiles. Paul told the Corinthian disciples to deliver him to Satan in order he would become aware and acknowledge his sin so that his spirit [soul] might be saved.

It should be obvious that sin begins in the inner man and can be a physical action such as sexual immorality or an attitude problem of desiring personal pleasure such as money or recognition.

In 2 Corinthians 2:6-9 Paul is concerned that the Christian delivered to Satan, who had repented did not feel he was accepted by the Corinthian Christians "The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him."

Repentance is not a simple change. It produces an action, a distinct alteration of one's focus on life from personal pleasure to a spiritual relationship with God.

Paul stated "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death." (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

James tells Christians to "... confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working (James 5:16).

John, the aged apostle, wrote in Revelation Chapter 1 to the churches of Asia telling them that unless they repented God would take action against them. Some may have believed as some do today that once they were saved they would always be saved. But their salvation was not guaranteed for John told them they needed to repent and return to God or He would **remove** their lampstand, source of light and life.

When a rebellious child of God becomes aware of his or her sinful situation, turns away from their sinful course toward a course pleasing to God, prays earnestly for God's forgiveness so he can be reconciled to Him and to those who are in Christ, God forgives.

The local congregation is not to regard him as a second-class Christian prohibiting from functioning as God's servant. For who but Christ has authority over His servants? They are to assemble with the wayward Christian, help and encourage him to live faithfully to God. He has returned and been forgiven by God and God expects him to perform functions needed by the Body. Leaders and brethren must not consider him less necessary or less important as all have sinned, repented and returned at some point during their Christian life whether publicly or privately. In fact, the whole church must assist the returning, repentant and reconciled brother in becoming a worker in the Kingdom.

Questions

1. The reconciling process must begin with the recognition of one's rebellious state and with a desire to be reconciled to God
 - True
 - False
2. What action does God require of a sinning Christian to return and be reconciled to him?
 - Physical punishment
 - Financial fine

- Baptized again
- Change in focus of life from self to God and pray for forgiveness
- 3. There are no New Testament examples of any Christian sinning and needing to repent and return to God.
 - True
 - False
- 4. A sinning Christian who repents and returns to God is restricted in serving God.
 - True
 - False
- 5. The local body of Christ must encourage the repentant Christian toward faithfulness and service.
 - True
 - False

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