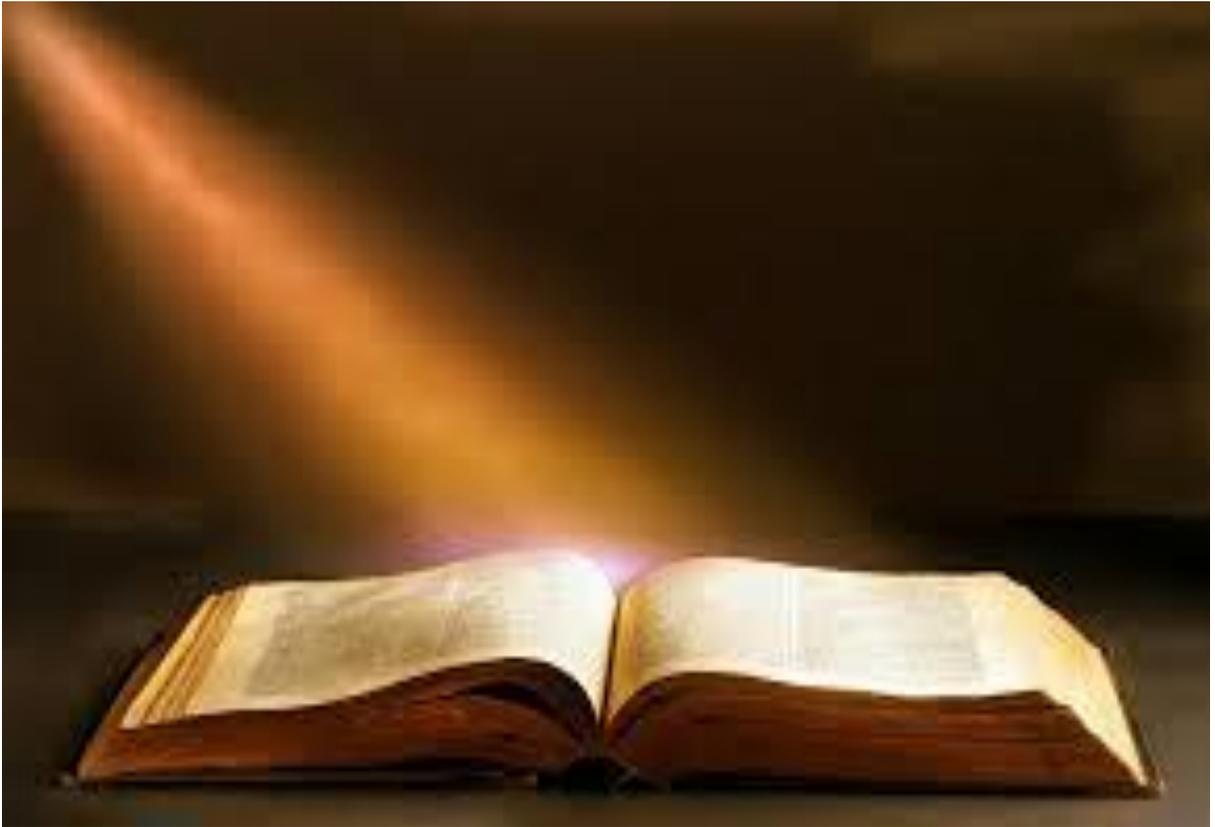


UNITED IN CHRIST



The Bible Way Online

United In Christ

Introduction

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." John 17:20-23

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Jesus – The Person

The environment into which Jesus was born was a closed society, a people who considered themselves superior to all other people. They were Jews and took great pride on being the Children of Abraham, God's chosen people. 'Abraham is our father' (John 8:38). They had 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.

They were also legalistic of the highest degree. They made sure they fulfilled the letter of the law, not necessarily the intent, in order to earn God's promises. For instance, Moses required them to tithe, 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 Messiah, The Anointed One, the Christ. The Jews believed that when He 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 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep [those who chose to be His (rd)] and my sheep know me [have an intimate relationship with Him (rd)] — 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 NIV). It would appear Jesus was referring to the Gentiles, all non-Jews.

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 or 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 disciple. 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 NIV).

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 - (NIV)]" (ESV)! One must know God's will to be able to do His will.

Knowing that His mission was to be **the sacrifice for the sins** of all people –Jew, Greek, 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 (rd)] 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 – the resurrected Christ], 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; 27; 20-23 NIV). Who are the 'all' Jesus was praying for?

The Oneness and Unity of the First Christians

Now immediately following Pentecost Christians, Jews and proselytes, were one, united In Christ, undoubtedly the unity mentioned in Christ's prayer in John 17.

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

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

"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).

But it would not always be this way. In a short time, perhaps within weeks or months unity begins to fade, the Grecian Christian widows were ignored. They were 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 NIV).

The solution to the problem of caring for the Grecian widows was much easier to resolve than maintaining unity and fellowship among all those in Christ.

Now let's go back to A. D. 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 and none should be excluded.

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, the atoning sacrifice (death by crucifixion), burial, resurrection and ascension of Christ they will be taught
- What it means to believe – not just the acknowledgement
- What action one must take to be in 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 two or perhaps three years one of the students desired to renew the fellowship they had during the six month of study and scheduled a reunion. They requested you to 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 understanding of issues listed below. The following words in **boldface type** are short lessons in the Appendix.

- I. One had returned to his former **homosexual way** of life
- II. Two were assembling where more than one container for the fruit the vine was used that some considered contrary to scriptures and that the bread must not be broken before the prayer of thanks.
- III. One reported he his brother who was so disabled they did not think he could be **immersed** so they poured water over him.
- IV. Two had come to the conclusion that **holy hands** must be raise unto God when praying.
- V. Three had concluded evangelists were to teach the gospel and elder-watchmen were to instruct, tend, the flock.
- VI. One divorced his wife even though she had not done anything to break the marriage covenant.¹
- VII. One thought it unnecessary to assemble together due to possibility of persecution.
- VIII. One Christian talented in music sang several solo songs during the assembly for the purpose of praising God and edify all present.
- IX. Several assemblies took the Lord's Supper during the week in addition to Sundays.

As their teacher they asked you to discuss unity in Christ, specifically how such a diverse group could remain united. Are they all still united in Christ and in their fellowship with each other? Are any of their actions or personal interpretations binding on others or are they just a diversity of opinion? But before answering these important questions explain the various methods used in interpreting scripture.

Methods Used In Interpreting The Scriptures.

Specificity [command]

Any specified action related to the topic, either requires or prohibits, all other action.

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 may vary by one's

¹ Discussed in [Marriage and Divorce](http://thebiblewayonline.com), thebiblewayonline.com

knowledge and intellectual abilities. Thus, different understandings may exist among those in Christ but one's understanding must not be forced upon another. They must remain private interpretations.

Necessary Inference²

A necessary inference would require Christians everywhere and at all times to comply. Their judgment has established a practice or procedure equivalent to a command of Christ based on their personal interpretation. The question then becomes who is authorized to decide for others what inference is necessary.

Inference

An inference is one's personal interpretation about a teaching.

Expediency³

Procedures or practices that, while not explicitly enjoined by the biblical text, are nonetheless not explicitly prohibited and thus are considered permissible because they are instrumental (or 'expedient') to the execution of some other clear biblical command.

Example

Examples in the Bible that show actions of an individual or an assembly of Christians are generally confined to one location rather than universal. They are actions, practices, not commands.

One needs to know how to use these interpretation methods to be able to properly understand scripture regarding beliefs, practices and procedures.

1. Examine all scripture relating to the procedure or practice
2. Determine
 - a. Is the belief, procedure or practice **specified** [commanded]? If so, then all other things relating to it are excluded. For instance, God specified that gopher wood was to be used in the construction of the ark. So, all other wood was excluded. God was not silent. He was specific.
 - b. If nothing was mentioned [**Bible is silent, does not specify**] then reasonable and responsible options are available. For instance, Paul could choose to sail, walk or ride to Macedonia. He chose to sail.
 - c. Every example must be analyzed to determine if they agree with or explain a specified command.
 - i. If it does, it is not the example that is 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.
 - iii. If it does not relate to or explain a command it may be considered detrimental to the body, if followed.

² An example of inference is one's conclusion that eating meat sacrificed to idols is worshipping the idol to which the meat was sacrificed and therefore a sin. A necessary inference makes it a sin for a Christian anywhere to eat meat sacrificed to an idol even though in their heart they considered the idol nothing while giving thanks to God for all His blessings.

³ It was his {Campbell's} contention that "the people of God are left to their own discretion" when it comes to the use of an expedient. There is no need for complete agreement in the church in this area, for "No class of men -- apostles, teachers, privates -- ever did agree on questions of expediency." He gave an example: "That 'marriage is honorable in all' is clearly taught; but who ever read a verse on the *manner* in which the most important of all social institutions is to be performed?" Thus, such expedients are left to the best judgment of individual societies.

Expedients are not biblically *specified*; therefore, they can never be biblically *regulated* or placed under the umbrella of direct biblical *authority*. And since men very rarely agree on matters of personal judgment, such agreement in the area of expediency is therefore not required (with regard to one's salvation or fellowship with the saints). Bro. Isaac Errett, one of the early leaders of the *Stone-Campbell Movement*, "insisted there could be great variety among the churches over matters of expediency. No such choice should ever be made a test of fellowship or a cause of division" [*The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, p. 325]. Reflections #261 by Al Maxey

If it is specified, then all Christians everywhere, at all times and in various cultures and societies must comply. God has spoken. Man must obey. But if it is not specified then reasonable and responsible judgments are allowed. God has not specified so personal judgments and private interpretations are not binding upon others. By understanding the methods used to interpret scripture one can begin to answer the questions about fellowship of the class of 76.

The Apostles' warnings

James warns of the dangers of teaching when one believes he has all, complete and perfect knowledge and understanding of God's will. He reminds them that they are not perfect as all stumble and that their incorrect teachings will affect one's entire course of life.

“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways, and if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body ... but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so” (James 3:1-3; 8-10 ESV).

Paul warned the Ephesian elders [watchmen of the flock on guard for wolves intent on the destruction of the flock (rd)] of the time when those within the close-knit community of believers would begin to draw people unto themselves not Christ and His Body of believers. Even today some attempt to convert people to “their church” rather than teach Christ and allow the gospel convert them to Christ.

“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 (rd)] and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number [elders] men will arise and distort the truth [by teaching their interpretations (rd)] in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard [stand your watch as a good sentinal (rd)]” (Acts 20:28-31 NIV)!

He also instructed Titus “For there are many [professing to be Christians (rd)] who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. 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 ESV).

Peter issued a warning to all Christians

“There were also false prophets [prophets during the Covenant given by God through Moses (rd)] among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you [teachers during the New Covenant as all truth has come (rd)]. They [spiritual wolves with their personal interpretations (rd)] will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them [probably the Gnostic belief that Jesus was not human only a phantom therefore nullifying His atoning sacrifice (rd)] — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed [desire for fame and/or fortune (rd)] these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up [their own interpretations (rd)]” (2 Peter 2:1-3 NIV).

The Passing of Time

Following the glorious years of the Greeks and Romans there was a gradual decline of the Roman Empire. The world ushered in the long period of Feudalism - sometimes referred to as the Middle or Dark Ages. Power, knowledge and wealth belonged to a few kings and their noblemen and to the leaders of the Roman

Catholic Church with the masses being repressed into an existence of poverty. All types of abuses occurred by the Catholic Church through governments. Even entire cities and villages were wiped out because they dared to oppose the Pope. But religious schools and universities developed inquisitive minds who dared to challenge the Popes and kings. Change was on the horizon, people demanded answers, more freedom and less control. The printing press contributed greatly to the dissemination of all kinds of information which resulted in even greater demand for freedom of thought, less government and religious control. ⁴

Prior to and following the American revolution people from all countries left their repressive governments and religions behind and flocked to the New World in hopes of finding freedom, a new life and opportunity. Having acquired some degree of freedom they began to look deep into their religious practices and questioned their traditions and creeds. Those not found in the Bible were rejected.

Barton W. Stone heard William Hodge preach that because of His love God desired everyone to have opportunity to be saved. This was new to Stone and motivated him to **an intense study** to determine the true nature of faith and obedience. ⁵ This attitude is a must in all times and all places if Christians are to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12) and not just believe what some trusted friend or religious leader states.

Devout men from many different areas of the country and different denominations turned to the Bible searching for truth, desiring to please God and to become united in Christ. What were they to use to determine unity and fellowship? Alexander Campbell stated “Faith in Jesus as the true Messiah, and obedience to Him as our Lawgiver and King, is the **ONLY TEST** of Christian character, and the **ONLY BOND** of Christian union, communion and co-operation; irrespective of all creeds, opinions, commandments, and traditions of men ⁶ [personal interpretations (rd)]. It was “what does the Bible say” [God’s will] vs Creeds. It was “The Gospel” [fact] vs “Doctrine” [teaching].

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 Old and New Testaments
- d. Christ’s sin-offering, burial, resurrection and ascension

The Gospel **is** included in all of the above. The gospel is the Good News that God came to earth in the body of Jesus of Nazareth the same as that of man, offered His sinless life as the only acceptable sacrifice to the Father, for the forgiveness of man’s sins. Thus, the **Gospel was and is Christ, His life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension - the atoning sacrifice - a 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” ⁷ so says Campbell.

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 [herald] the gospel” (Mark 16:16). It is what Paul preached when he preached ‘Christ crucified’ (1 Corinthians 1).

⁴ Teachings, Practices and Interpretations of the Bible after AD 100, R Dunn, p. 50-52

⁵ Restoring New Testament Christianity, Adron Doran p. 54-55

⁶ Christianity Restored, Alexander Campbell, p. 9

⁷ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 49

The following are comments by a few restoration leaders who were from various denominations and geographical areas. They were searching the Bible to determine God's will for His children to be united as one people in Christ. Thus, they questioned their religious practices, creeds and traditions.

John Locke stated the essential core teachings of Christ were ⁸

1. The messiahship of Jesus
2. Jesus' direct commands

Walter Scott in The Gospel Restored claimed the gospel has: ⁹

1. Facts clearly put forth in the gospel - Jesus died, was buried and raised from the grave;
2. Commands of the gospel - believe, repent and be immersed
3. Promises - the remission of sins, the gift of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

To reform the church, one must of necessity restore the gospel.

O'Kelley and Haggard stated: There are five cardinal principles: ¹⁰

1. Christ is the only head of the church
2. The name Christian is the only acceptable name
3. The Bible is the only rule of faith
4. Christian character is the only test of church fellowship
5. The right of private judgment is the privilege of all

Alexander Campbell's essential aspects of primitive Christianity were

1. Congregational autonomy
2. A plurality of elders (shepherds, sentential)
3. Weekly communion
4. Immersion [of believers] for remission of sins ¹¹

Thomas Campbell in his Declaration and Address stated:

"That the Church of Christ 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 according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else, as none else can be truly and properly called Christians."¹²

These restorationists were **searching to learn** and **understand** from the inspired word God's message for redemption so all believers could be united as one in Christ. Some of their points addressed practices they believed were contrary to the Bible and needed to be abandoned. They described their understanding of what it takes to unite all Christians of the day. They were correct that **repentance** ¹³ and **obedience of the gospel gets one into Christ**. But several essentials and principles were their own opinion and interpretation while they were working through to a better understanding of what God desired of His people.

⁸ Teachings, Practices and Interpretations of the Bible after AD 100; p. 71 (from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_Movement) R Dunn

⁹ Restoring New Testament Christianity, Adron Doran p. 36

¹⁰ Teachings, Practices and Interpretations of the Bible after AD 100; p. 74 (from The Eternal Kingdom, F.W. Mattox p. 312) R Dunn

¹¹ Teachings, Practices and Interpretations of the Bible after AD 100; p. 77 from en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restoration_Movement; The BibleWay Online, R Dunn

¹² Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 25

¹³ "Not a mere feeling; it has not the uncertainty of moods and sentiments. It is not a simple change in the weather of the soul. It is a distinct alteration of the focus of the intelligence; it carries with it a movement of the will; in short, it is a revolution in the very ground of the man's being." (Reflection, Al Maxey)

Christians of every generation by constant study grow and mature in their knowledge and understanding of God's will began to abandon some of their earlier opinions, interpretations and misunderstandings. So, the question that needs to be addressed is 'do doctrines, creeds, dogmas, interpretations, opinions and forbearance promote **or** prohibit unity? They prevent unity.

Doctrine / Teachings

Definitions

Doctrine - (Greek *didachee, didachees*) - teaching, instruction, a creed or body of teachings of a religious organization, dogma

Sound teaching- (Greek *hugiainoo*) does not deviate from the truth, wholesome and uncorrupted

Trustworthy - (Greek *pistos, pistee, piston*) trusty, faithful ... believing and the execution of commands

Apostles' Inspired Teachings

Paul stated in 1 Timothy 6:2b-4 "Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine 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" (ESV). Thus, the apostles' taught the Gospel [the only way to 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

Titus 1:9 – Referring to overseers [watchmen, elders, guardians] "He must **hold firmly** to the trustworthy message [the Gospel of Christ (rd)] as it has been taught, so that he can **encourage** others [**able to give instruction** (ESV)] by sound doctrine [faithful and true teachings of the message (rd)] and refute those who oppose it" (NIV). [Part of the watchmen's / elder's job].

Titus 2:1-10 – "You [Titus] must **teach** what is in accord with **sound doctrine**" (NIV). [Paul then lists what are apparently some sound teachings]

Teach - the older men to be

- Temperate [sober-minded –(ESV)]
- Worthy of respect [dignified–(ESV); reverent (NKJ)]
- Self-controlled [temperate (NKJ)]
- Sound in faith and love
- Endurance [patience (NKJ)]

Teach - the older women to

- Be reverent in the way they live [reverent in behavior–(NKJ)]
- Not to be slanderers - gossipers
- Not to be addicted to much wine [slaves to much wine–(ESV)]
- Teach what is good.
- Train the younger women to:
 - love their husbands and children
 - be self-controlled and pure [discreet, chaste (NKJ)]
 - be busy [working at home (ESV)]
{guard/keepers of the household affairs (Thayer)}
 - be kind [good (NKJ)]
 - be subject to their husbands -that no one will malign the word. [Don't knowingly do things he disapproves of or that you know irritate him, neither should the husband. (rd)]

Encourage the young men [probably includes Timothy] to

- be self-controlled [sober-minded (NKJ)].
- be a model [**Set** them an example (NIV)] of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity [seriousness (NIV)],
- 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 (NKJ)] from them
- be fully trusted so the teaching about our Savior is attractive.

1 Timothy 6:1-3 – “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” (ESV).

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

Unsound Doctrine (teaching leading to unrighteousness)

1 Timothy 6:3-5 “Anyone who **teaches something different** [from that discussed in earlier chapters] is arrogant [I have all the right answers. You must agree with me (rd)] 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” (NLT).

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 (NIV)] 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 -NIV, irreverent - ISV], for those who strike [kill (ISV, NIV)] their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, (*pornos*) men who practice homosexuality [adulterers (NIV)], 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” (ESV).

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 (rd)] with destructive heresies, [self-chosen doctrine – {personal interpretation binding upon others (rd)} not emanating from God (Easton's Bible Dictionary)] resulting in a party or sect even to the point of denying the Master who bought them” (NET).

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 (ESV)], he gave them over to a depraved mind (debased

(ESV)], 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 (NKJV) to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (NIV).

Summary Doctrine and Teachings

1. The gospel is Christ
2. Sound or wholesome teachings, are essentially all things that lead those in Christ to grow and mature into the likeness of God - godliness, righteousness and holiness. They are teachings how to live lives pleasing to God.
3. Unsound teachings would include any teaching that leads to acts which, if not repented of, prevent one [including any who profess to be Christians (rd)] from entering the Kingdom of Heaven. They are unsound, corrupted and damnable teachings that lead men away from God toward godliness and wickedness. They teach their personal interpretations, inferred conclusion either for or against something, of which the Bible has nothing to say [Bible Silence] or some favored example as if it were a command and then attempt to bind their personal understanding upon others as a condition for fellowship.

Man’s Doctrinal Teachings

Creed - the written and/or oral body of teachings accepted by a religious group that excludes those who are not in agreement.

Dogma - a religious doctrine that is proclaimed as true without proof

Opinion - what “one” thinks –their personal belief (which may or may not be held as their private interpretation).

Pattern – a cherished convictions whether written or oral traditions that are required for others live by in order to be in their fellowship.

Thus creeds, dogmas, opinions and patterns distinguish one group or body from others. Even small or insignificant teachings, beliefs or opinions can divide and separate groups of common heritage.

“No human creed in Protestant Christendom can be found, that has not made a division for every generation of its existence. And I may add – the more thinking, inquisitive, and intellectual the community which owns a creed, the more frequent their debates and schisms. But the Bible will do no better, if men approach it with a set of opinions, or human symbols in mind. For then it is not the Bible, but the opinions of the mind, that form the bond of union”¹⁴ or fellowship.

Therefore, those in the Body of Christ must not impose private opinions or interpretations upon others. To do so greatly displeases God. Recall that Jesus prayed that his disciples would be one as He and the Father were one (John 17).

“Mr. {Thomas} Campbell put it this way ‘Thus we conclude to make no conclusion of our own or of any other fallible fellow creature, a rule of faith or duty to our brother.’ ... ‘No man has the right to judge his brother except insofar as he manifestly violates the express letter of the law [a command or something specified (rd)].’ He also believed that ‘we have no right to take offense at a brother’s opinion so long as he holds

¹⁴ Christianity Restored, Alexander Campbell, p. 105.

them as such. If he does usurp the place of the lawgiver and makes his opinions into law for others, we judge him even then, not for his opinions, but for his presumption.”¹⁵

Around 1848 John W. Nevin, a noted theologian, was puzzled that most of 53 groups surveyed claim to possess “no creed but the Bible.” He asked “how does it come to pass that where men are left most free to use it [the Bible] this way ... they are flung asunder so perpetually in their religious faith.”¹⁶

“In {Barton} Stone’s view, heresy involved not so much believing doctrines but a lack of love and a rending of the body of Christ, He did not believe that a set of correct doctrines (teachings) would unite believers.” ... He concluded “none but those who have the spirit of the Bible can really unite on the Bible.”¹⁷

Thomas Campbell stated that “To heal division and create unity one must “profess, inculcate and practice neither more or less, neither anything else nor otherwise than the Divine word **expressly declares** respecting the entire subject of faith and duty, and simply to rest in that as the expression of our faith and rule of our practice.”¹⁸

An example; “If those who believe in pre-millennialism had set forth as their own interpretation, and if others of us had allowed them to hold such opinions without reprisal, it would never have a cause of division. But such was not the case either those opposing or those supporting the belief, for both **insisted** their interpretation was correct and that others must follow it. You cannot be a pre-millennialist and be within my fellowship.”¹⁹

Those who insist that their opinion and interpretations are required for fellowship with God and man and demand acceptance as a test of that fellowship should be marked for dividing and denominating over ‘their’ doctrine (Romans 16:20).

Summary of Man’s Doctrine and Teachings

None of these creeds, doctrines, dogmas, opinions, patterns or interpretations will save. It is only God’s grace, Christ, which is received by one’s obedience to the gospel of Christ. Divisions occur when personal opinions and interpretations are made a condition of membership or fellowship. Those who do not agree or accept these interpretations are judged as heretics, divisive brothers in error or false teachers. Those holding these opinions and interpretations have elevated themselves to a position equal to God by becoming judges rather than servants.

Those in Christ need to examine their actions to determine if they are keeping their opinion, interpretation, private and personal or forcing them upon others in order for them to be in fellowship with them. The forcing of one’s personal opinion(s) upon others divides. This attitude is the opposite of Jesus’ statements about the greatest two commandments – love God and love fellowman.

James writing after the persecution by the Jews in Jerusalem and before the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 warned of this.

“Do not speak evil against [defame, slander, misrepresent, vilify, malign, disparage (rd)] one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is only one lawgiver and judge, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor” [any other person (Thayer)] (James 4:11-12 ESV)?

¹⁵ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 19

¹⁶ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen pgs. 15-16

¹⁷ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen pgs. 16 & 20

¹⁸ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 20

¹⁹ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 19

Difference in Gospel and Doctrine

Christians need to understand that the **Gospel is a fact, things that have occurred**. Jesus was and is God conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of woman, thus also human. He lived a sinless life offering his earthly body to God as the only and perfect sacrifice that could remove sin. He was buried in a human grave. He became victorious over death and the grave when God resurrected him.

Teachings are not facts but are interpretations of an understanding. The teachings of Christ and His apostles are not the gospel but an inspired explanation of how those in Christ are to live and grow and mature into God's nature, 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.

What can be established about this example?

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" (ASV).

This appears to be emphatic and without any room for interpretation.

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

The interpretation of liar, murder and fornicator does not alter the emphatic statement of Revelation 21. But anyone who demands that everyone follow his interpretation of who the liars, murders and fornicators is divisive. Romans 1:32 states one who “continues (NIV), (practices -NKJV)” the action. God knows the heart and will judge justly. Man cannot decide who is in fellowship with God and His Children.

It is a most serious offence 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.

In Christianity Restored Alexander Campbell wrote that there is a distinction between the Gospel and Doctrine - the gospel is of Christ while the doctrine [teaching] is of the Apostles – **the Gospel is a fact** while the apostles’ teachings are inspired interpretations. “Fact means something done. Truth and fact, though often cofounded, are not the same. All facts are truths, but all truths are not facts, That God exists, is a truth, but not a fact; he created the heavens and the earth, is a fact and a truth. That Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles is a truth, but not a fact; and that he preached Christ to the Gentiles, is both a fact and a truth. ... But something must be done, acted, effected, before we have a fact.”²⁰

Since the gospel is a fact, that is; Christ, the sacrificed Jesus of Nazareth, and the apostles’ teachings are inspired truths, the distinction between the two will be clarified in the following five points.

1. The gospel is a proclamation of the good news that one accepts or rejects. It was preached long before any New Testament scriptures. Thus, a belief in the one fact (Christ is Lord) and a submission to the one act (baptism) is the basis of unity.²¹ [Repentance is an action that must also take place.]
2. The teachings of the apostles are not facts, as the gospel is, but [inspired] interpretations, implications, and edification 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 us 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 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 [from Alexander Campbell].

Summary

It is one’s personal understanding, interpretation and inference, **when required to be accepted by others to be in fellowship**, that division occurs; i.e.; the Corinthians stating “I am of Paul” or “I am of Apollos” (1Corinthians 3:4). Whenever a group or body adopts their personal belief as a requirement whether written or oral for membership or fellowship in their association they separated themselves from the oneness of those In Christ. Whereas, the basis for unity is Christ - God’s Good News!

Selected New Testament Examples

In Acts and the Epistles there are many examples of actions and activities by assemblies and individuals. Occasionally, we hear someone state “They did this in a certain city in the book of Acts” implying the same activity must be done today.

All examples in Acts and the Epistles are not to be followed for instance:

- a. Division of the church in Corinth
- b. Argument between two Christian women in Philippi
- c. The desertion of Demas for love of the world

²⁰ Christianity Restored, Alexander Campbell, pgs. 106-7

²¹ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, pgs. 21-22

- d. The more affluent Corinthian Christians humiliated the poor Christians by feasting before they arrived to assemble. This resulted in the poor having insufficient food to satisfy their physical needs.
- e. Lying to the Holy Spirit; e.g., Ananias and Sapphira
- f. Neglecting the needy Grecian widows in Jerusalem

Not every example is required to be followed by Christians everywhere.

- a. In Acts 14:6 Paul fled potential persecution. It is doubtful anyone thinks missionaries in India, Philippines, Haiti or Africa must flee when persecution raises its ugly head.
- b. In Acts 15 the church gathered in Jerusalem to resolve a dispute over a doctrine/teaching/opinion that required complying with the Law of Moses in order to be saved. If a local congregation has problems with Christians from some other congregation insisting that their interpretation of some teaching be accepted there is no requirement to call a council together to resolve the problem.
- c. In Acts 18:18 Apollos taught only the baptism of John. Priscilla and Aquila invited Apollos into their home and taught him. This example does not require all Christians to conduct Bible Studies in their homes.
- d. Paul instructed the evangelists Timothy to appoint elders in Ephesus and Titus to appoint elders in every town on the Isle of Crete. It is doubtful that any church today has an evangelist, if there are any in the city, to appoint their elders.
- e. In Acts 13 they were worshipping and fasting in Antioch. Is fasting required every time one worships?
- f. The church met in the home of Philemon. Are Christians only to assemble in home of Christians? Or, is every Christian required to have a church meet in their home?

There are other examples that some demand everyone follow to be in fellowship with them. Yet, others understand the example differently and require all to follow their interpretation to be in fellowship with them. For example, the employment of pulpit preacher, associate preacher, youth minister or educational minister are probably based on an understanding of the KJV mis-translation of *dielégeo* [meaning to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss - from Thayer's Greek Lexicon] as preached in Troas Acts 20:7. The Greek word for preached is *keerux*, *keerukos* [meaning a herald or proclaimer - from Thayer's Greek Lexicon]. Other translations have talked or spoke. Therefore, the questions are:

1. Who is to decide which interpretation or example are the ones that must be followed in order to be in fellowship with God - elders, the assembly as a whole, some type court or no one?
2. What are the consequences for following the elders', pastor's or preacher's opinions and decisions without attempting to determine if they are in accord with the scripture?
3. What are the consequences for following an interpretation by some overseer, pastor or preacher when you believe it is not in agreement with your understanding of the Scripture?
4. What are the consequences for not following watchmen's, pastor or preacher's decision, instead of follow your own understanding?
 - a. Exclusion from fellowship with local congregation.
 - b. Exclusion of fellowship with God and others into Christ.
 - c. Both

Man is responsible to God for his own actions. It must be his faith, belief and understanding. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (2 Cor 5:10 ESV)

Summary of Some New Testament Examples

Examples show what Christians did in one city but not necessarily in every city. Examples do not require or prohibit but are actions of a particular location. If an action is required of Christians it would have originated from a specific instruction, generally considered a command and required by every Christian

everywhere and in all generations. However, if an example is required by a local church as a condition of fellowship or membership it has become their creed. They have placed their judgment on the same as that of the apostles.

Forbearance

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

- a. Forbearance does not require one to surrender any truth.
- b. Private or personal opinions should be expressed openly for discussion but never made a test of fellowship.
- c. 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.
- d. Christians can differ about a lot of things and still be one.
- e. When one in Christ abandons Christ and ceases to trust in Him. He is no longer in fellowship with Christ.

Thomas Campbell chided the attendees to the Mahoning Baptist Association that they could not withhold fellowship from one belonging to Christ because their personal opinions were different.²²

Alexander Campbell in an address caused concern about unity. John Rogers and others of Kentucky wrote to him expressing their regrets over his remarks stating the unity movement would never divide if:²³

1. No one should surrender any truth.
2. No one should be asked to give up opinions held but to make sure he holds them as private property and not make them a test of communion.
3. Unite on the basis of belief in the one fact (Jesus is the Christ) and obedience to the one act (immersion). Nothing else. Opinions, deductions, interpretations or speculations about scripture cannot be made a test of fellowship. We can differ about a lot of things and still be one. [At some point those out of Christ must turn to God repent by altering their life's course and put their trust in God through obedience. However, when one in Christ abandons Christ and ceases to trust in Him they are no longer in fellowship with Christ (rd)].
4. In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things love.

Raccoon John Smith identified the Gospel as a system of facts, commands, and promises, and insisted that no deduction or inference drawn from them, however logical or true, forms any part of the gospel. **Opinions about the gospel are not part of the gospel** and therefore cannot be held as threat over those who deny them. One should surrender any opinion for sake of unity but **never** give up one fact, command, or promise.²⁴

Demanding a personal opinion be made a test of fellowship causes strife and division

²² Restoring New Testament Christianity, Adron Doran p. 44

²³ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, pgs. 38-40

²⁴ Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship, Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 41

Summary of Forbearance

If these are not valid, all congregations are divided for there are many differing opinions. Some Christians remain silent while others are vocal. Some in expressing their opinion(s), whether unintentional or intentional, appear to cast doubts about the integrity of those who differ with them. Statements such as ‘my belief is straight from of the Bible’ or ‘the Bible states’ indicate 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 the function they perform or opinion they hold. Love of brethren must prevail.

One in Christ and In Fellowship with One Another

Fellowship - (*koinoonia*) sharing with others, association, community, communion, participation, contact, contribution and collection.

Unity - (*henotes*) oneness

Observe:

“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).

“I [Paul] have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

“We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we **might** become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:20-21).

“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized **into** [union with (ISV)] 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 ESV). *{Greek *sunthapto*, (*sun* with + *thapto* entomb), - to bury with, or together (Vine's Expository Dictionary) – so, one is buried and united with Christ in His death.}

Jesus’ mission is summarized by John the Baptizer “The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29)!

- Christ’s mission was to remove sin from man
- Jesus lived among men without sin
- God made Jesus to be sin
- Christ died with our sins placed upon Him
- Christ removes sin when one by trust and obedience
 - Dies to sin
 - Is buried with his or her sins into Christ’s death leaving them with those placed on Christ at the cross
 - Is raised a new creation by God free of past sins
 - Is put by God into Christ’s body, His Church

- Does His will - evangelizing, encouraging and performing good works - because of love for Him not of duty or command.

This is what occurred on Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2:38ff. Those who repented¹² 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 cleansed their sins. Therefore, they were united with Christ and continued steadfastly in the apostles' teachings before any epistles had been written. The Apostles' doctrine, teachings, did not add anything to the Good News, Christ's death and resurrection. Their 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; i.e., 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 [no sin (rd)] and unproveable 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).

"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 understanding or interpreting of some non-specific instruction (not a command), is his practice of judging a sin? Does it constitute rebellion? 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 (rd)], and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (ESV).

Wherein is unity, oneness in fellowship of those in Christ achieved?

- In the local assemblies of the saints
- The teachings of "The Church"
- Everything in the New Testament
- The Gospels and Acts
- Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

None of these bring unity. One is "united with Christ in His death" thus Unity is in Jesus Christ – the person. He is the Good News. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus, the Christ!

K. C. Moser

"True gospel preaching has been eclipsed by plan theology. ... Preaching thus focused on the 'plan' – on what people must do – not - on Christ and his role as sin-bearer. The 'plan,' in fact, was not intimately connected to Christ's death at all - rather, by his death Christ simply gained the authority to institute the plan. In the preaching of the plan, Moser observed, the cross usually 'receives little or no emphasis' for it was simply one step in the giving of the 'plan'." ²⁵

John Smith

"God has but one people on earth. He has given them but one Book, and therein exhorts and commands them to be one family." ²⁶

Barton Stone

²⁵ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 163

²⁶ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 39

Stone believed that character [what I am and how I live (rd)], not formal orthodoxy [what I believe or profess (rd)], provided the truest measure of a person's Christian standing. "How many, reputed orthodoxy, have not the mark of God's people! ... How many reputed heterodoxy [unorthodox-Webster] have it so evident that all may see?" Stone later wrote "faith and baptism are the divinely instituted means of salvation.

The apostles preached the gospel [Christ (rd)]. The people believed and were baptized; and through this means they were saved."²⁷ He also stated "If our faith be ever so imperfect, and blended with error, yet if it leads us to do the will of God, and bear fruits of the Spirit; if it works by love; if it purifies the heart; if it overcomes the world – it is the faith of a Christian."²⁸

Alexander Campbell

Campbell noted that the spirit of preachers began to shift away from preaching the gospel to denouncing error in dogmatical, unfeeling and snarling temper manner. Proclaimers of the ancient gospel had become too much addicted to denouncing the sects and representing them in masse as wholly aliens from the possibility of salvation.²⁹ [Most often error being denounced is any teaching that differs from their interpretation (rd)].

Who then is a Christian, Campbell asked? It is "everyone that believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah, the Son of God; repents of his sins, and obeys him in all things according to his measure of knowledge of his will"³⁰ [and continues to live in submission of His will (rd)].

The gospel is the power of God to save those who obey it. The gospel does not consist on the detached facts of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel is not simply facts about Jesus. The good news of salvation is Jesus crucified for our sins, buried and raised for our justification.³¹

Religious traditions and institutions are fundamentally conservative and conformist. "They prize stability and resist change having both benefits and problems. As tradition grows they tend to contain dissent, to close questions once left open, and to narrow the range of allowable diversity. Traditionalists tend, by reflex, to offer answers already at hand and to discourage the reopening of questions long thought settled."³²

Charles R. Brewer

Brewer wrote that many Christians have the gospel "a system of divine laws for humans to obey and thus save themselves sans [without-(rd)] grace, sans mercy, sans everything spiritual and divine – except that the 'plan' was in mercy given."³³ The plan of salvation is Christ not man's actions of hear, believe, repent, confess and be baptized.

Summary One in Christ

All are united by their obedience based upon their belief, faith and trust in Christ. He is the Good News which is - Christ (God, the Son), who came to earth in the Flesh as Jesus of Nazareth, offered Himself to the Father, as the perfect and only sacrifice to atone for man's sins, was resurrected from the grave and returned to Heaven from whence He came. Their obedience led to their death to a life of sin, their burial into Christ's death and their being raised by the Father as a new creation. They were then united with Christ

²⁷ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 42

²⁸ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 44

²⁹ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 57

³⁰ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 59

³¹ Can The Gospel Be Obeyed? K. C. Moser

³² Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 172

³³ Distant Voices, C. Leonard Allen p. 164

and all others in Christ and would remain united “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel” (Colossians 1:23).

Therefore, if one has not been united with Christ in His death, he has no fellowship with Christ or those in Christ who have been buried with Him through immersion into Christ death through their trust and obedience.

If we do not fellowship those in Christ who have reached a different understanding than ours, how can the blood of Christ continue to cleanse us?

Apparently, the reason the world has such a difficult time believing the Gospel is due to the division among those professing to follow Christ.

Re-United with Christ

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? Must a Christian desiring to be reconciled to God restore to the one sinned against all the wrong they have done? 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 rebellious state and with a desire to be reconciled to God and to anyone harmed by their sin. But desire alone is not enough; there must be a change in attitude, heart, mind and their 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.

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 ESV).

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 ESV). 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 ESV).

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 turned from their sin of rebellion, repented of their sins by tearing down their idol false gods and returning to Jehovah with a penitent and contrite heart, He 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 - NKJV; abandoned - GWT) me" (2 Timothy 4:10 ESV).

In the New Testament we read that Simon, the sorcerer or magician, of Samaria requested 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 ESV).

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 (rd)] might be saved. 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" (NIV).

Repentance is "Not a mere feeling; it has not the uncertainty of moods and sentiments. It is not a simple change in the weather of the soul. It is a distinct alteration of the focus of the intelligence; it carries with it a movement of the will; in short, it is a revolution in the very ground of the man's being."³⁴ Perhaps the Bible expresses it better: when Paul stated "now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done" (2 Corinthians 7:9-11 NIV). Repentance produces an action, a change in one's course from worldliness to a life toward godliness.

James tells Christians to "Therefore, 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 ESV).

My opinion is that one is to confess to the one sinned against, either God or man or both. It does not say confess "I have sinned" but confess "your sins."

John, the aged apostle, wrote in Revelation 1 to the churches of Asia telling them that unless they repented God would take action against them. Their salvation was not guaranteed for they needed to repent and return to God.

There may be more scriptures but these all require a change in attitude toward God, the desire to do His will to please Him and to seek His forgiveness.

If a rebellious child of God become aware of his or her sinful situation, turns his or her life from its sinful course toward one pleasing to God, prays earnestly for God's forgiveness and to be reconciled to Him and to all those who are in Christ, God forgives. They are not to be regarded as second-class Christians who are

³⁴ *The Pulpit Commentary*, vol. 18, p. 66 quoted in REFLECTIONS #515 Al Maxey, January 3, 2012

not allowed to serve. For who but Christ has authority over His servants? They are to assemble with other Christians who are to help and encourage them to live faithfully to God. They have returned to their former forgiven state and are to perform functions needed by the Body. Leaders and brethren must not consider them less necessary or less important as all have sinned, repented and returned at some point during their Christian life. In fact, they must assist them in becoming workers in the Kingdom.

Statements from The Reformation and Restoration Were they valid then? - Are they valid today?

1. In essentials, unity; in Bible-essentials liberty; in all things, love [from the days of Luther (rd)] time. ³⁵
2. We take the Bible, the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible as the foundation of all Christian union and communion. ³⁶
3. Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent. ³⁷
4. Men are at different stages of maturity, that they are constitutionally different, and that it is “morally impossible” for them to see everything alike. ³⁸
5. No man has the right to judge his brother except insofar as he manifestly violates the expressed letter of the law. ³⁹
6. The Bible is the only rule of faith. ⁴⁰
7. Divisions for the most part, are over matters of private opinion, not over non-essentials. ⁴¹
8. The call to unite the church is not unreasonable, the time is not unreasonable. ⁴²
9. Our efforts for unity are but a humble beginning, so we solicit the helps of others, for the collective graces of the whole church will assure to success. ⁴³
10. Division is terrible sinful, obstructing the mission of the church. ⁴⁴
11. Christ is the only source of unity, his word the only terms. ⁴⁴
12. It is the responsibility of Christians to be more sensitive to the division within the church and do something about them, however insurmountable the task may appear. ⁴⁴
13. Since Christ prayed for the unity of the church, it must follow that adequate means can be found. ⁴⁴
14. Since we will be one in heaven, we must be one on earth. ⁴⁴
15. We must begin to associate with each other and be less interested in our own party, or unity will never be achieved. United we shall prevail! ⁴⁴
16. With nations being ravaged by war, how can we remain a divided church? ⁴⁴

During the reformation and restoration periods slogans, such as the above, were used as tools to impress key points critical to uniting of all believers into Christ. Slogans were easy to help hearers remember a point since printed material was not readily available. Slogans often do not carry the full import of the message being presented and may not be valid or true.

³⁵ [Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship](#), Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 35

³⁶ [Our Heritage from the Pioneers](#) Hailey p. 113

³⁷ This became the battle cry for the birth of the Reformation movement ... the impetus for a movement that resulted in three distinctive bodies: (1) Churches of Christ, (2) Christian Churches, and (3) Disciples of Christ, [freedominchrist.net/Sermons/Hermeneutics/We Speak Where the Bible Speaks.htm#_ftn2](http://freedominchrist.net/Sermons/Hermeneutics/We_Speak_Where_the_Bible_Speaks.htm#_ftn2); Robert Richardson, *Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* (Indiana: Religious Book Service, 1897), Vol., 1:237.

³⁸ [Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship](#), Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, Summary excerpts from Declaration and Address, p. 21

³⁹ [Our Heritage of Unity and Fellowship](#), Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside, p. 19

⁴⁰ [Teachings, Practices and Interpretations of the Bible after AD 100](#); p 74 from [The Eternal Kingdom](#), F.W. Mattox p. 312; R Dunn

⁴¹ Ibid p. 23

⁴² Ibid p. 24

⁴³ Ibid p. 25

⁴⁴ Refer to BibleWay - Worship God in Spirit and Truth, Assembling Together

United in Christ Summary

When Christians assemble together, ⁶² they do not need to hear the gospel constantly repeated as they have already acted upon their belief/faith. They need to be edified and encouraged to live faithfully and to continue doing good so God is glorified.

Christians can pray, sing making melody in heart, partake of the Lord's Supper, give to those in need and teach the gospel whether they assemble together or not. However, if these are done when assembled with other Christians it is encouraging to all present.

Christians know the teachings of Christ and His apostles with varying degrees of knowledge and understanding. Some are Bible scholars while others have infant, adolescence or immature adult knowledge. Therefore, some are more capable than others in discerning a false teaching. A presentation and discussion, rather than a lecture or sermon, provides hearers the opportunity to challenge an interpretation or teaching. It is a most serious matter when presenters intimidate hearers by their demeanor, actions or attitude of authority for requesting proof from the scripture of their interpretation. By demanding scripture references relative to the teaching, false teachings are more easily identified and corrected. If the presenter / teacher refuses to provide Biblical references and continues to teach and demand that all others in Christ MUST accept his interpretation, he should be identified, marked, as a divisive person or false teacher.

Conclusions on United In Christ

- The degree to which one complies with New Testament teachings vary depending upon one's knowledge and ability to understand.
- God does not hold one accountable beyond his ability to comprehend.
- Differences of understanding result from lack of study, education, attitude or different levels of intelligence.
- Everyone who believes in his heart that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah repents of his sins by making a U-turn in one's course of life and obeys Christ's Gospel according to his ability to comprehend the will of God is in Christ.
- **All who are in Christ** are joined together as brothers because they **are joined to Christ**.
- **Christ's and the Apostles' Teachings** on how to live acceptably before God are truths to be followed but they **are not the gospel**. **Christ** is the Gospel, the Good News!
- No servant can decide for God which other servant of His is in fellowship with Him. God alone is judge. We are servants.
- The restoration leaders did not agree among themselves. No Christians today or in any period of time had or will have complete agreement on every teaching of the Bible.
- The Gospel is **THE** way unto salvation, whereas the teachings of Christ and His apostles are instructions to those in Christ how to live godly as living sacrifices while growing into the likeness of God.
- One's personal interpretation and understanding do not put him "in" or exclude him "from" fellowship with God.
- All who are in Christ have fellowship with Christ and are also in fellowship with all others who are in Christ.
- Christ's Body is **NOT** divided therefore those who refuse to be in fellowship with God's family have also withdrawn their fellowship from God.
- Whenever one places 'his understanding' on the same level as Christ's Gospel and insists that all must accept 'his personal interpretation' to be in fellowship with Christ and with all others who are in Christ, has replaced Christ as judge. A most serious sin as it replaces unity with division.

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APPENDIX

Homosexuality

Is the practice of homosexuality an alternative lifestyle, or is it sin? Is it a blatant digression from God's law? Those who accept the Bible as God's inspired, inerrant and God breathed Word have no other choice than to turn to His Word to find that answer. Before we look to the Bible and its specific verses in their context, I think it might be helpful to consider just a few facts about the background of this issue, worldwide.

For example, homosexuality is not really a contemporary issue at all. Anthropological investigations have indicated that homosexual behavior occurred, even among the most ancient of tribes. There is very little about it in recorded history. A law in the Theodosian Code (*C. Th.* 9.7.3) was issued in 342 AD by the Christian emperors Constantius II and Constans, which prohibited same-sex marriage in ancient Rome and ordered that those who were so married were to be executed.⁴⁵

Times have changed. Not only are homosexual practices largely legal, they are becoming increasingly commonplace and accepted in our culture.

A homosexual act is an act of sexual intercourse between two members of the same sex. It is an act. There is a difference between a homosexual act and homosexual orientation. A homosexual orientation is a tendency or a desire to prefer a homosexual relationship over a heterosexual one.

A homosexual **act is an action**; a homosexual **orientation is the desire** or the longing. Those two are as different as a heterosexual act is different from a heterosexual orientation.

What does the Bible say about homosexual behavior? The Word of God doesn't have a wealth of material on the subject, but when the Bible has something to say about homosexuality, it speaks strongly against such behavior. I suppose the first place you run across it in the Bible is Genesis 19. Lot, who was kin to Abraham, received two strangers in the town of Sodom and his house was literally bombarded by the lewd, base fellows of the town, men who were obviously homosexual, both in their orientation and in their action.

⁴⁵ Kuefler, Mathew (2007). "The Marriage Revolution in Late Antiquity: The Theodosian Code and Later Roman Marriage Law." Journal of Family History 32 (4): 343–370.

So, they stormed Lot's home. Eventually by the way, Sodom and its sister city, Gomorrah, were destroyed. In Judges 19, you read about a similar situation, this time in the city of Gibeah.

They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire." Jude states in verse 7 that individuals were condemned suffering vengeance of eternal fire because of their homosexual behavior. This also corresponds to some Old Testament prohibitions, like Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 where male homosexuality is described as an abomination for which the death penalty is prescribed.

The strength of these statements is found both in their context and also with the severity of the penalty that is attached. Then when you go from the Old Testament into the New Testament, you find that Paul continues to deplore homosexual activity.

"Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts unto uncleanness, that their bodies should be dishonored among themselves: for that they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile passions: for their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was due" (Romans 1:22-27).

"You know that wicked people will not inherit the kingdom of God, don't you? Stop deceiving yourselves! Sexually immoral people (fornication – KJV), idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunks, slanderers, and robbers will not inherit the kingdom of God" - a lifestyle (1Corinthians 6:9-10).

"Some people have left these qualities behind and have turned to fruitless discussion. They want to be teachers of the Law, yet they do not understand either what they are talking about or the things about which they speak so confidently. Of course, we know that the Law is good if a person uses it legitimately, that is, if he understands that the Law is not intended for righteous people but for lawbreakers and rebels, for ungodly people and sinners, for those who are unholy and irreverent, for those who kill their fathers, their mothers, or other people, for those involved in sexual immorality, for homosexuals, for kidnappers, for liars, for false witnesses, and for whatever else goes against the healthy teaching" (1 Timothy 6-10).

Now I want to point something out here that if you haven't heard before, you will probably hear in the future. There has been a movement afoot, among liberal theologians, to stress that Paul in those three admonitions against homosexuality, was condemning perversion, not inversion. You remember the difference? That Paul was saying to those individuals who were "born with a natural attraction for the opposite sex", but who have changed, that for those individuals to do so is wrong. The implication there is, "if anyone is an invert who chooses to practice homosexual behavior, that person would not be prohibited." People, that is not right ... that theory holds absolutely no water. There are at least two reasons I can show you from scripture that is true:

- 1) The primary reason is the word that Paul used to condemn homosexual behavior in Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and in 1 Timothy 1. He uses a Greek word that is really an umbrella term that refers to all homosexual behavior. By contrast, he could have used one of three different Greek terms that would have referred specifically to sexual perversion, but he chose not to do that. So, the implication is clear, whether inversion or perversion, homosexual activity is condemned.

2) Notice that the context in Romans 1 is that of creation. The prohibition against homosexuality isn't just aimed at individuals, whether inverts or perverts. It states that that's in violation of God's order of things. "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 quality, his eternal power and his divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that men are without excuse" (Romans 1:19-20). You see, the context of Romans 1 is that God's made it clear what his design was. It is for a man to choose a woman, and for the two to be together within the context of marriage, in a life-long relationship. That is the natural way God made things, the way He has chosen to run this world. It is very clear from the language.

Conclusion on Homosexuality

The consistency and the fervor with which the Bible speaks against homosexual acts mean that a Christian cannot accept such a practice, as a God-ordained or a God-accepted lifestyle. That would be true regardless of an individual's sexual orientation or motivation.

The Bible teaches that we abhor sin, but we love the sinner. A man or a woman is a homosexual because of their sexual practices. For many Christians the nature of the sin homosexuality is of such distaste we have had a hard time segregating the sin from the sinner.

There are those in our world who may have a homosexual orientation and are fighting the sin. God can rescue them from that, just like he can rescue you and me from our tendencies to whatever our Achilles heel of sin is--and ours may be totally different. But I implore Christians, as we face the homosexuality issue, don't run from the problem, face it. Love the sinner while abhorring the sin. That's what Jesus did, that's what he would expect us to do regarding the sin of homosexuality as well as the sins of prostitution, chemical dependency, anger and all other sins. (Extracted and adapted from Amazing Grace lesson #1013 – Steve Flatt)

Immersed

Definition

The Greek word translated 'baptize' means immerse. Thayer's Greek Lexicon on *BAPTIZO* says: "to dip, immerse, submerge." Strong's Concordance defines *baptizo*, "to make whelmed i.e.: fully wet" Lydell and Scott define it as "To dip, dip under." Modern English dictionaries may give other definitions but this only reflects modern usage not its meaning in the language of the Bible. Greek dictionaries of Bible words show "baptize" means to immerse.

Is Pouring an Acceptable Method of Immersion Baptism?

Exponents of sprinkling or pouring overlook an important factor. The original New Testament text and the spoken language of that day was Greek. The writers of the New Testament knew the Greek word "*baptizo*" meant to immerse, they also knew or could have known that "*rantizo*" meant to sprinkle and "*cheo*" meant to pour. These often-used words were never interchangeable, having separate meanings. If God had intended for immersion into Christ death to be sprinkling or pouring, then the Greek word "*rantizo*" or "*cheo*" would have been employed, not "*baptizo*."

The Bible Evidence

The best way to understand a Bible command is to study the passages that refer to it in context comparing them to other passages on the subject. This is how we learn the meaning of words. Notice what baptism requires and consider what action fits what the Bible says:

a. Baptism requires water

Acts 10:47-48 - "Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized."

Note: Any liquid could apply to *baptizo* {immersion}, *rantizo* {sprinkle} and *Cheo* {pour} but water specified.

b. Baptism requires much water

John 3:23 states, "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there..."

Note: "Much water" is not needed if one is merely being sprinkled or poured, but it is necessary for immersion.

c. In baptism people came to water

Matthew 3:5-6 - "Then Jerusalem was going out to him, and all Judea, and all the district around the Jordan; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins."

Acts 8:36 - "As they were going along the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, "Look, there's some water. What keeps me from being baptized?"

d. Baptism involves going down into and coming up out of the water.

Mark 1:9-10 - "It came to pass in those days that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up out of the water, He saw the heavens opening, and the Spirit descending upon Him" (NKJV, ISV read 'like a dove').

Note: When one is immersed into Christ's death God raises him up and give him the Holy Spirit.

Acts 8:38-39 reads, "and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water."

Note: Here the obvious reference is to immersion. Sprinkling or pouring do not require going down into the water. But baptism by immersion both going down and coming up.

e. Baptism is a burial and a resurrection.

Colossians 2:12 - "buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead."

Romans 6:4-5 - "Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection."

Note: In baptism we are buried with Jesus and raised with Him. As He was buried in the earth, we are buried in baptism.

Some say baptism is "just a symbol" of Jesus' burial, so it does not matter how it is done. There is a symbolic element in baptism, but how does that prove that the action does not matter? Do the passages say Jesus was buried, but it doesn't matter whether or not we are buried? It says we are buried and we are raised in baptism. The one to be baptized is to be buried and raised.

Actually, symbols are important, especially, when it was God Himself who selected the symbols. Who would presume to change what God wanted?

Obviously, death, burial and resurrection in baptism is something that God wants us to know and be reminded of by the symbolic action that He chose for us to do. Romans 6:1 - 12 tells us how important it is for the Christian to be reminded that he died with Christ in baptism:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin live in it? Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore, we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father so too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be also in

the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is to never die again; death no longer is master over Him. For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey its lusts." (adapted from Baptism into Christ, Joe McKinney, 2007)

Lift Up Holy Hands

"In his letter to Timothy, Paul said that men are to pray, 'lifting up hold hands' to God (1 Timothy 2:8). Why don't people lift up their hands when they pray today?"

The "lifting up holy hands" is more than likely an expression borrowed from the Old Testament because of a common (though neither mandated or rigid), ancient practice of raising one's hands when praying. When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple, "he spread forth his hands toward heaven" (1 Kings 8:22). In one of his prayers, David exclaimed: "Hear the voice of my supplications, when I cry unto you; when I lift up my hands toward your holy oracle" (Psalm 28:2). To the superficial, hypocritical worshippers in the era of Isaiah the prophet, the Lord God said: "And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:15).

These passages illustrate the fact that on occasion the Hebrews held up their hands when they prayed. Such was not always the case, however, and other postures are mentioned. Prayer was made standing (1 Samuel 1:26), kneeling (1 Kings 8:54), prostrate (1 Kings 18:42), audibly (John 17:1; 18:1), silently (1 Samuel 1:13), with bowed head (Genesis 24:26), with uplifted eyes (John 17:1), etc. Obviously, a particular posture in prayer was not a binding pattern.

Furthermore, **literally** speaking, there is no such thing as "holy hands." This is a figure of speech known as the synecdoche (the part put for the whole); "holy hands" stand for a holy person. In Proverbs 6:16-19 several body components are used metaphorically to stress certain evil actions. Mention is made of "haughty eyes," a "lying tongue," "murderous hands," a wicked "heart," and mischievous "feet."

Some have inquired as to whether there is any wrong with people raising their hands when they pray, even in the public assembly? In some churches this is becoming more common. There is nothing intrinsically wrong with this practice. Perhaps a word of caution would not be out of place, and admittedly one must be cautious here. Lifting up hands when praying is then a personal opinion which must not be bound on others. If it results in division of the Body or in chaos and confusion, then the practice of lifting up hands when praying should not be practiced and additional study on the subject would be in order.

Wayne Jackson, christiancourier.com/articles/1093-are-christians-required-to-lift-up-holy-hands

Consider:

Is the raising of hands a desire to please God, a show of rebellion and contempt or just a desire to be like those in other religious organizations?

Do those who object desire to bind their interpretation on those in their assembly as a condition of fellowship?

Issues preventing Unity

At some point Christians need to examine issues and practices that divide those who profess to be in Christ and lay each issue or practice alongside the Bible to determine if they are Christ's and the inspired apostles' teachings **or** someone's uninspired opinion, interpretation or inference. If any issue or practice is of such concern that they prevent you from associating with or fellowshiping anyone in Christ or some congregation, you should evaluate your interpretation to determine if it is in agreement with the scriptures.

1. State the issue or practice
2. Identify **all** scripture relating to such issue or practice
3. Examine your understanding by applying the methods of interpretations identified in 'Oneness and Unity'.
4. Determine if the issue or practice is;
 - a. Contrary to the specific command to obtain salvation
 - 1). Christ's life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension
 - 2). The putting trust and faith and trust in Christ
 - 3). The change in your course or direction in life - repentance
 - 4). Living a godly life while growing into the likeness of God
 - b. A difference in understanding of a teaching about how one is to live godly before God
5. Evaluate your fellowshiping position with those who differ with your interpretation on that teaching – not a specified command – and determine if you are allowing God to judge or if you are doing the judging.

A partial list of differences of opinion among believers in Christ that often results in the refusal of fellowship.⁴⁶

1. Taking of oaths
2. Serving in the military
3. Inflicting capital punishment
4. Using force to defend oneself or others
5. Voting for political candidates
6. Serving as a government official
7. Engaging in political activism
8. Christmas or Easter programs
9. Letting a non-member lead prayer
10. Lifting hands while singing
11. Joining a ministerial alliance
12. Indwelling of the Holy Spirit
13. Work of the Holy Spirit
14. Baptism of the Holy Spirit
15. Prayer for healing
16. The Trinity
17. Special providence
18. How God answers prayer
19. Fasting
20. Translations of the Bible
21. Use of *Thee* and *Thou* in prayer
22. Authority of elders
23. Who selects and appoints elders
24. Qualifications of elders
25. Tenure of elders
26. Elders presiding at the Lord's Table
27. Qualifications of deacons

⁴⁶ Free In Christ, Cecil Hook, pgs. 4-6

28. Deaconesses
29. Enrolling widows
30. Addressing disciples as *Major* or *Doctor*
31. Long hair on men
32. Midweek contributions
33. Dimming the lights during prayer
34. Singing as the emblems are passed
35. Use of church buildings for secular activities
36. Use of pictures of Jesus
37. Use of symbols such as the cross
38. Use of steeples and stained-glass windows
39. Use of the term *Sunday School*
40. Passing of the collection baskets
41. Eating in the church building
42. Grounds for dis-fellowshipping
43. Support of colleges from the church treasury
44. Divorce for any cause
45. Remarriage of a divorced person
46. Preacher officiating at a wedding of a divorced person
47. Disciples marrying non-members
48. Preacher officiating for a mixed marriage
49. Use of an instrument in “church” weddings
50. Method and type of inspiration of the Bible
51. Re-baptism of Baptists and Christian Church members
52. The “five items of worship”
53. Use of choirs, choruses, quartets, solos, etc.
54. Serving the Lord’s Supper on Sunday evening
55. Serving the Lord’s Supper other than in assemblies
56. Integration of races
57. Smoking
58. Total abstinence from alcoholic beverages
59. Membership in fraternal orders
60. Contributing to public charities
61. Use of Bible class literature
62. Youth directors, youth rallies, youth camps
63. The six days of creation being literal days
64. The extent of evolution
65. The operation of Christian hospitals
66. Awards and prizes for church activities
67. Debating religious issues
68. Ministers of education, ministers of music, etc.
69. Benevolence to fellow-disciples only
70. The baptismal “formula”
71. Formal confession before baptism
72. Going to law against disciples
73. Dedicating babies
74. Signing contribution pledge cards
75. Children’s homes under eldership or a board
76. Dancing
77. Women wearing shorts and slacks
78. Women wearing slacks to church services

79. Girls leading prayer in family devotionals
80. Girls leading prayer in youth devotionals
81. Clapping hands during singing
82. Buying VBS refreshments from the treasury
83. The present-day activity of demons
84. Applauding in the assembly
85. Use of God's name as a by-word
86. Use of euphemisms of God's name in by-words
87. Use of contraceptives
88. Abortion
89. Adopting out an illegitimate child
90. Women working outside the home
91. Children's Bible Hour
92. Bussing children to services
93. "What is to be will be."
94. Bodily resurrection
95. If we shall know each other in heaven
96. Degrees of reward and punishment
97. Whether heaven and hell are literal places
98. Dress code for men serving the Lord's Supper
99. Whether Christ came in AD 70
100. A name for the church

Questions

1. When Christ was born the leaders of the Jews were legalistic in that they kept the letter of the law not the intent or purpose.
True ___ False ___
2. The Jews in general but especially their leaders considered themselves superior to all other people –
"Abraham is our father"
True ___ False ___
3. The Samaritans were considered brethren by the Jews
True ___ False ___
4. Following Pentecost Christians were united in Christ except for the proselytes who became Christians
True ___ False ___
5. Hebraic Christian Jews treated the Greek Christian widows as inferior as evidenced by not providing for their needs as the did the Hebraic widows
True ___ False ___
6. Jews and Gentiles Christians with all kinds of sins; e.g., prostitutes, drunkards, slave traders who changed their lifestyle, and were buried (immersed, baptized) into Christ blood are in fellowship with all others in Christ
True ___ False ___
7. The Gospel is a fact - Christ was crucified and resurrected
True ___ False ___
8. Teachings are not facts but interpretations of a belief or opinion
True ___ False ___
9. Some people will intentionally distort truths for personal gain, recognition or power.

True ___ False ___

10. Which methods are used in personal interpretation?
- a. ___ Specificity – something required or prohibited
 - b. ___ Silence – Neither requires or prohibits any action
 - c. ___ Inference – one’s personal interpretation of a teaching
 - d. ___ Necessary inference – personal interpretation required of other to be in their fellowship
 - e. ___ Expediency – not explicitly required or prohibited considered permissible to perform a clear biblical truth, command
 - f. ___ Examples
 - g. ___ All the above
11. The Gospel is
- a. ___ Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
 - b. ___ The entire New Testament
 - c. ___ Both the Old and New Testaments
 - d. ___ Christ’s atoning sacrifice, burial, resurrection and ascension
 - e. ___ All the above
 - f. ___ None of the above
12. Sound teachings lead one to grow into the nature and likeness of Christ
True ___ False ___
13. Unsound teachings lead one away from Christ toward ungodliness
True ___ False ___
14. A creed is written or oral requirements that must be accepted to belong to a religious group
True ___ False ___
15. Dogma is a religious doctrine proclaimed as truth but without proof
True ___ False ___
16. Opinions are non-binding personal interpretations
True ___ False ___
17. Patterns are cherished convictions of a written or oral tradition required of members of a group or organization
True ___ False ___
18. Writings by restoration leaders, “church fathers,” religious scholars or the writer of this lesson are not inspired but personal interpretations
True ___ False ___
19. Creeds, dogmas, patterns, opinions will save one eternally
True ___ False ___
20. Christians must forebear all doctrines, teachings and interpretations
True ___ False ___
21. One who changes their lifestyle, calls upon God to forgive and is buried into Christ death is united with Him
True ___ False ___
22. Unity, oneness in fellowship, with Christ and all brethren is achieved in
- a. ___ Local assemblies
 - b. ___ Teaching of “the Church”

- c. Everything in the New Testament
 - d. The Gospel - Christ
 - e. Matthew Mark, Luke and John
23. One who has returned to his former worldly way of life can be re-united with Christ by:
- a. Recognition of rebellious state
 - b. Repentance change from rebellious state in heart and life
 - c. Communicating the desire for forgiveness to God
 - d. Assembling with the Body of Christ for encouragement
 - e. All the above
24. Unity among Christians can be achieved on opinion and interpretation
True False
25. Shepherds are to know the Word and to guard the flock of Christians against teachings of false teachers.
True False
26. The apostles' teachings are inspired but personal opinions and interpretations of their teachings are not.
True False

