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Unity

The Watchtower Reprints, September 1, 1883, p. 1572

“The endeavor to compel all men to think alike on all subjects, culminated in the great apostasy and the development of the great Papal system.”

The New Creation (SS-6), 1911 ed., p. 241

“With human methods divisions are unavoidable, - except as in Papacy’s period of triumph, when the nominal system became powerful and used drastic methods of persecution in dealing with all not fully in accord with itself. That, however, was a unity of force, of compulsion, - an outward unity, and not a unity of the heart. Those whom the Son makes free can never participated heartily in such unions, in which personal liberty is utterly destroyed.”

The Watchtower, August 1, 1960, p. 474

“Jehovah’s witnesses, though international, are ‘one heart and soul,’ of the ‘same mind’ and the ‘same line of thought.’”

The Watchtower, April 1, 1986, p. 31

“Obviously a basis for approved fellowship with Jehovah’s Witnesses cannot rest merely on a belief in God, in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and so forth...Approved association with Jehovah’s Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

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trary: Paul's letters, weighty with logical reasoning, do not even mention the subjects upon which sectarians do most insist, and which are by them generally made *tests* of fellowship.

Paul said nothing about an everlasting torture of sinners; he said nothing whatever about a mysterious trinity, in which three Gods are incomprehensibly *one* God and at the same time *three* Gods; he said not a word about man being of a nature such as *could not die* but *must live* everlastingly, in a place of either pleasure or woe; he said nothing, either, about the present life ending all trial for all classes; and he entered into no entangling discussion about the bread and wine used in commemoration of the Lord's death—as to transubstantiation or consubstantiation; yet it can easily be discerned that he was not in harmony with any of these errors.

Notice particularly, however, that without so much as *mentioning* a single one of these sectarian tests of fellowship, Paul declares: "I have not shunned to declare unto you *the whole counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27) From this it is very evident that *none* of these points, which are today regarded as the very essence and substance of Christian doctrine and as the proper tests of faith, are the *one faith*, or in any sense or degree parts of "the faith once delivered unto the saints."—Jude 3.

The *one faith*, which all should hold, was a very simple one: one so simple that all, the learned and the unlearned alike, could grasp it and comprehend it, and be "*fully persuaded* in their own minds" concerning it. It was not a dose of incongruous mysteries, inconsistent with themselves and unharmonious with reason as well as with the Bible, to be swallowed by the ignorant with credulity, and by the learned with hypocritical mental reservations; but it was so simple, and clear, and reasonable, that any and every honest follower of Christ could be *fully persuaded in his own mind* concerning it.

What was this *one faith*? The basis of it is stated by Paul, thus: "I delivered unto you *first* of all, that which I also received [first of all—as a foundation truth or doctrine, upon and in harmony with which all other doctrines must be built], how that *Christ died for our sins*, according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." (1 Cor. 15:3, 4) "There is *one God* and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."—1 Tim. 2:5, 6.

This, in a word, confesses sin and utter helplessness; it acknowledges God's loving plan for our redemption; it owns that our Lord's death was our ransom price; and that forgiveness (justification), and reconciliation to God, and the restoration of believers, come as a result of *faith* in this Redeemer, when in due time it is made known to each and all.

These brief statements contain the whole gospel, in the same sense that an acorn contains an oak tree. Without this gospel kernel, the true gospel can never be possessed; hence *this must be insisted on* as a test of Christian fellowship. This must be received, else the gospel is not received. When it is received, the gospel is received. Then a work of growth begins—a development of *this* gospel. It may vary in rapidity of growth according to temperament and surroundings; it can develop into a twig, a sapling, a sturdy oak successively, but the nature of the seed will appertain to it in every stage of its development. So is faith—the true faith: it must begin with the *one kind of seed-faith* in all, no matter what stage of development each may attain. This one gospel acknowledges man's fall and sinfulness, and God's mercy and love manifested through Christ's great work of redemption, forgiveness and final restoration of all the willing and obedient, but of no others. All theories, and they are many, which omit any of these items are spurious.

Some deny God's love in the matter, and claim that all the love was Christ's, and that he *interposed* and thwarted the Father's original plan; but those of the one faith are guided by our Lord's own testimony, that God so loved the world that he devised the plan as it is being carried forward, and sent his only begotten Son to do what he has done and is yet to do for the world. (John 3:16, 17) Others deny that any *redemption* was accomplished by the death of our Lord Jesus, deny that his life was substituted as a corresponding price or "*ransom for all.*" and claim that the Father does all by simply *pardoning* the sinners. But again the *one faith* is clearly pointed out by the words of Paul—"There is one *mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself a *ransom* [corresponding price] for all."

When received into honest hearts, this simple gospel, the

true gospel, will gradually open up and spread its roots of reason and its branches of hope in every direction, feeding upon the promises of God, building itself up as he designed, and grasping, as it progresses, the "one baptism" (See TOWER, June 15, '93) and every other feature of the gospel in its fullness.

Note the difference between this, God's test, on the simple first principles of the gospel, and the wrong course of men who attempt to enforce upon all an entire system of faith (and that when they are the merest babes in Christ), so fettering them, then, that their growth is hindered. To ask babes in Christ to assent to thirty or forty articles of faith arranged by fellow-men, and to agree to take those as the infallible truth, and to promise never to believe either more or less than they contain, is like selecting in an orchard one gnarled and crooked tree, as a *standard*, and requiring all the other trees to be padded out to make them look as thick and as gnarled as the sample, and to be bound with iron bands that they might never grow larger or straighter.

This true gospel, this simple faith, easily understood and confessed by the weakest babe in Christ, must also be, and always, and equally, the faith of the most developed sons of God. *This one faith* (and not the endless ramifications and details of faith which lead out from it) Paul placed as a standard or test of all claiming the name Christian. All the consecrated who agreed on this one standard, or foundation truth, Paul counted as in and of the one church. While each member was to grow in grace, knowledge and love, there would always be harmony and oneness in the faith and fellowship of the church, if all growth were kept in line and harmony with his foundation truth.

Here was a perfect basis of union, which allowed for all the various stages of individual *development in the truth*, and which most effectually guarded against errors. For if this simple creed were today made the standard by which all doctrines should be tested, it would speedily lead to the discarding of every error and to the true union of the church in the "one Lord, one faith and one baptism."

The endeavor to compel all men to think alike on all subjects, culminated in the great apostasy and the development of the great Papal system; and thereby the "gospel," the "one faith," which Paul and the other apostles set forth, was lost—buried under the mass of uninspired decrees of popes and councils. The union of the early church, based upon the simple gospel and bound only by love, gave place to the bondage of the church of Rome—a slavery of God's children, from the degradation of which multitudes are still weak and suffering.

The Reformation movement of the sixteenth century came as an effort to regain liberty of conscience; but, deluded by the idea of an *elaborate creed*, insisted upon for so many centuries, the reformers and their followers formed other systems of bondage very similar to that of Papacy, though slight modifications gave liberty to fuller ideas on some subjects. And so it has been ever since: each new reform movement has made the failure of attempting to make a creed just large enough for its prime movers.

A "CHURCH TRUST" UNDESIRABLE

But while division in the church of Christ are very wrong, and very contrary to the will and word of our Lord, they are better far than a *union* in bondage under Papacy's system, creed, etc., Instead, therefore, of attempting to get all the sects to combine in a sort of "church trust," an image or likeness of the Papal system of oneness (though on a higher plane), to regulate and restrict further investigation and further growth, we need to do the very opposite—to abolish all sects and all elaborate creeds and confessions of faith. Instead of being further bound (by such a church trust union—or wheel within a wheel, double imprisonment), all bondage should be set aside, except the simple tests first imposed in the one faith once delivered to the saints; and all party sectarian names should be repudiated, and the name of Christ should be the only name borne by his church.

Such a breaking down of sectarian fences would leave the true children of God willing to accept the original and simple test—"all one in Christ Jesus;" and this is what is needed. It would destroy sectarian pride, which so often counterfeits true Christian zeal and love, but it would tend to develop the truth, and thereby to develop the real zeal for the truth which our Lord desires in his followers. The term Church of Christ would no longer mean to any "our denomination," but, when they would sing,

"I love thy church, O God,
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand,"

asleep to await the grand organization of the Millennial morning in the First Resurrection, and that the places of these were being continually supplied, so that the Church was never without a full organization, although at times there might be greater weaknesses in one member and greater strength in another. However, the endeavor of each member at all times must be to do everything in his power for the upbuilding of the body, for the strengthening of the members and for their perfection in the graces of the Spirit—"till we all come to the unity of the faith."

Unity of faith is desirable; it is to be striven for—yet not the kind of unity that is generally aimed at. Unity is to be along the lines of "the faith once delivered unto the saints" in its purity and simplicity, and with full liberty to each member to take different views of minor points, and with no instruction whatever in respect to human speculations, theories, etc. The scriptural idea of unity is upon the foundation principles of the Gospel. (1) Our redemption through the precious blood, and our justification by faith therein. (2) Our consecration, sanctification, setting apart to the Lord, the Truth and their service,—including the service of the Brethren. (3) Aside from these essentials, upon which unity must be demanded, there can be no Scriptural fellowship,—upon every other point fullest liberty is to be accorded, with, however, a desire to see, and to help others to see, the divine plan in its every feature and detail. Thus each member of the body of Christ, maintaining his own personal liberty, is so thoroughly devoted to the Head and to all the members that it will be his pleasure to lay down all, even life itself, on their behalf.

We have already considered the special work of the apostles, and the fact that their number was limited, and that they are still performing their service in the Church, speaking as the Lord's mouthpieces to his people through his Word. Let us now examine something respecting these other services of the Church to which the Apostle refers as the Lord's gifts to the general body, or *Ecclēsia*.

The Lord provides the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers, for the blessing of the general body, as respects both their present and their everlasting welfare. It is for those who are earnestly relying upon the Lord as the Head, the Instructor, the Guide of the Church, his body, to expect, look for and notice his gifts in all these particulars; and to accept and to use them—if they would have the promised blessing. These gifts are not forced upon the Church, and those who neglect them, when offered, experience a corresponding loss. The Lord set these in the Church at the beginning and thus gave us the ideal Church arrangement, leaving it to his people to follow the pattern thus set them and to have proportionate blessings; or to ignore the pattern and to have corresponding difficulties and disappointments. Let us, as those who desire to be led and taught of the Lord, seek to learn how he set the various members originally, and what gifts of this kind he has been bestowing upon his people since, that we may thus appreciate whatever gifts of this character are at our disposal, and may the more zealously avail ourselves of them for the future.

The Apostle declares that it is the Lord's pleasure that there be no schism in the body—no splits, no divisions. With human methods divisions are unavoidable,—except as in Papacy's period of triumph when the nominal system became powerful and used drastic methods of persecution in dealing with all not fully in accord with itself. That, however, was a unity of force, of compulsion—an outward unity, and not a unity of the heart. Those whom the Son makes free can never participate heartily in such unions, in which personal liberty is utterly destroyed. The difficulty with the Protestant denominations is not that they are too liberal and, therefore, have separated into many fragments, but rather that they still have much of the spirit of the mother institution, without possessing the power which she at one time exercised for quelling and suppressing liberty of thought. We will, doubtless, surprise many by saying, that instead of having too many divisions or splits

of his impotence. The pope is not dictator in Spain or president in Colombia, and if the local Catholics (headed by their church leaders) ignore their own church law as they in many places ignore papal instructions (for example, the social encyclicals) then the very pope is powerless." If the members do not obey the head, can there be one live body?

¹⁰ If the Roman church is just one body, why are the different orders, like the Franciscans, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, and so forth, acting like separate bodies? Why do such orders fight each other like political parties to get the deciding influence on the pope and church policy?

¹¹ Is the church really a unity when its members, like the Catholics in Italy, are found in all political parties from the extreme right all the way across the political color spectrum to the extreme Communist left? Could they ever make up one true church body; one, as Jehovah and Christ Jesus are one? Could they internationally be one when some of them are headed by cardinals who, for nationalistic reasons, are not even on speaking terms? And in the case of war, does the Roman church, and other denominations for that matter, preserve the unity they claim to possess? Everybody knows they do not. They all give in under that crucial test of their unity as a church and prove that the ties uniting them to worldly unities are stronger than those binding them to their church unity and to their god. All this makes it impossible to see the unity of the Christian church in the Roman Catholic international church organization.

A SIGN TO THE WORLD

¹² In contrast to all this discouraging division, it is heart-cheering to find one international body of Christians on earth

12. (a) What do Jehovah's witnesses have to back up their claim of true unity? (b) With what right do they join Paul in using Romans 8:35-39?

today that is a true unity, a true international brotherhood, united in faith and organization by the bonds of love. It is a fact of which everybody is invited to convince himself, and we are not immodest in pointing to it, that Jehovah's witnesses, though international, are "one heart and soul," of the "same mind" and the "same line of thought," and have 'one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father.' They are Christians who are bound into a unity with Jehovah God and Christ Jesus and their brothers with bonds of love so strong that nothing, including wars, can disrupt it. Their international church organization comprising witnesses in many countries is made up of the remnant of the bride class of Christ Jesus; and united with it into "one flock" under "one shepherd" is a great crowd of "other sheep." (John 3:28-30; 10:16) The modern history of these witnesses shows that they have experience enough to join the apostle Paul in saying: "Who will separate us from the love of the Christ? Will tribulation or distress or persecution or hunger or nakedness or danger or sword? Just as it is written: 'For your sake we are being put to death all day long, we have been counted as sheep for slaughter.' To the contrary, in all these things we are coming off completely victorious through him that loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor governments nor things here nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creation will be able to separate us from God's love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. 8:35-39.

¹³ The world-wide unity of Jehovah's witnesses gives cause for various reflections. If the international brotherhood of the early church of the first century was a true wonder and admittedly a product of

13. For what reflections does the unity of Jehovah's witnesses give cause, of what is it a sign, and for whom?

declare to you as good news something beyond what we declared to you as good news, let him be accursed." Paul then repeated that statement for emphasis.—Galatians 1:8, 9.

Teaching dissident or divergent views is not compatible with true Christianity, as Paul makes clear at 1 Corinthians 1:10: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." (*New International Version*) At Ephesians 4:3-6 he further stated that Christians should be "earnestly endeavoring to observe the oneness of the spirit in the uniting bond of peace. One body there is, and one spirit, even as you were called in the one hope to which you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all persons."

Was this unity to be achieved and maintained by each one's independently searching the Scriptures, coming to his own conclusions, and then teaching these? Not at all! Through Jesus Christ, Jehovah God provided for this purpose "some as apostles, . . . some as evangelizers, some as shepherds and teachers . . . until we all attain to the oneness in the faith and in the accurate knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man." Yes, with the help of such ministers, congregational unity—oneness in teaching and activity—could be and would be possible.—Ephesians 4:11-13.

Obviously, a basis for approved fellowship with Jehovah's Witnesses cannot rest merely on a belief in God, in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and so forth. The Roman Catholic pope, as well as the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, professes such beliefs, yet

their church memberships are exclusive of each other. Likewise, simply professing to have such beliefs would not authorize one to be known as one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

Approved association with Jehovah's Witnesses requires accepting the entire range of the true teachings of the Bible, including those Scriptural beliefs that are unique to Jehovah's Witnesses. What do such beliefs include?

That the great issue before humankind is the rightfulness of Jehovah's sovereignty, which is why he has allowed wickedness so long. (Ezekiel 25:17) That Jesus Christ had a prehuman existence and is subordinate to his heavenly Father. (John 14:28) That there is a "faithful and discreet slave" upon earth today 'entrusted with all of Jesus' earthly interests,' which slave is associated with the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses. (Matthew 24:45-47) That 1914 marked the end of the Gentile Times and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the heavens, as well as the time for Christ's foretold presence. (Luke 21:7-24; Revelation 11:15-12:10) That only 144,000 Christians will receive the heavenly reward. (Revelation 14:1, 3) That Armageddon, referring to the battle of the great day of God the Almighty, is near. (Revelation 10:14, 16; 19:11-21) That it will be followed by Christ's Millennial Reign, which will restore an earth-wide paradise. That the first to enjoy it will be the present "great crowd" of Jesus' "other sheep."—John 10:16; Revelation 7:9-17; 21:3, 4.

Do we have Scriptural precedent for taking such a strict position? Indeed we do! Paul wrote about some in his day: "Their word will spread like gangrene. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of that number. These very men

have deviated from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already occurred; and they are subverting the faith of some." (2 Timothy 2:17, 18; see also Matthew 18:6.) There is nothing to indicate that these men did not believe in God, in the Bible, in Jesus' sacrifice. Yet, on this one basic point, what they were teaching as to the time of the resurrection, Paul rightly branded them as apostates, with whom faithful Christians would not fellowship.

Similarly, the apostle John termed as antichrists those who did not believe that Jesus had come in the flesh. They may well have believed in God, in the Hebrew Scriptures, in Jesus as God's Son, and so on. But on this point, that Jesus had actually come in the flesh, they disagreed and thus were termed "antichrist." John goes on to say regarding those holding such variant views: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, never receive him into your homes or say a greeting to him. For he that says a greeting to him is a sharer in his wicked works."—2 John 7, 10, 11.

Following such Scriptural patterns, if a Christian (who claims belief in God, the Bible, and Jesus) unrepentantly promotes false teachings, it may be necessary for him to be expelled from the congregation. (See Titus 3:10, 11.) Of course, if a person just has doubts or is uninformed on a point, qualified ministers will lovingly assist him. This accords with the counsel: "Continue showing mercy to some that have doubts; save them by snatching them out of the fire." (Jude 22, 23) Hence, the true Christian congregation cannot rightly be accused of being harshly dogmatic, but it does highly value and work toward the unity encouraged in God's Word.