

MAKE IT AS SURE AS YOU CAN

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In recent months and years a great deal of thought has been given to the matter of religious unity. A great deal has been written and a great deal spoken on this theme. There seems to be a widespread, growing realization that the millions of honest, sincere people who believe in Christ must be united if they are to have any real influence in the world. This emphasis upon Christian unity is encouraging, and I would like to add my bit to this important and long over-due emphasis. The ecumenical yearnings of our generation are not new, for they are mere echoes of the emphasis found in the scriptures. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been signified unto me concerning you, my brethren, by them that are of the household of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I mean, that each one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?" (I Cor. 1:10-13).

Even more significant was the earnest petition of our Lord on the night of his betrayal, when, after praying for the eleven apostles, he said, "Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that thou didst send me." (John 17: 20-21).

Two Important Principles

As helpful in bringing about the religious unity which all of us increasingly desire, I want to suggest two simple but important principles. The first is: Deal with only one thing at a time. When we look at the whole realm of religion the problem of achieving unity seems insurmountable. It defies solution. There are so many doctrines, beliefs and practices that it seems hopeless ever to work out a unified faith which all followers of the Lord will accept. But if we make each decision individually--one at a time--I believe that we can do it.

Some time ago we visited the International Business Machines pavilion at the New York World's Fair. There we saw a very interesting demonstration of the principle that makes possible our modern, intricate computers. These unbelievable machines operate on a very simple principle. On any given point they have only two possible reactions. Either yes or no, positive or negative, plus or minus. When the computer is programmed it is guided to make a yes or no, plus or minus, positive or negative reaction to literally thousands of different items. Then, operating at the speed of light, the machine reads these simple yes or no reactions and produces a solution that seems unbelievably complex. With lightning speed it simply looks at all its yes or no decision points and comes up with the total answer.

This suggests at least something of the approach that I believe will bring great results in achieving religious unity. While it at first appears like oversimplification, it will make a great difference in our ability to see and to think alike religiously if we deal with only one thing at a time. At the risk of over-simplification we might illustrate it in terms of our daily lives. Many people find, as they look at the next day's activities, with so much involved, so many decisions to be made, so many activities to be engaged in, that they hardly feel equal to the task of facing the new day. However, they need to think of it in terms of just one decision at a time. When they awake, they face the decision to get up or not to get up. This is easily and immediately answered. Then the next item is to eat breakfast or not to eat breakfast. This, too, can be decided with out difficulty. Then, they must decide to go to work or not to go to work. As the day wears on they must decide to make a phone call or not to make a phone call, to write a letter or not to write a letter, and to do a host of other things. But in each case, it is a yes or no reaction to one simple item at a time. I confidently believe that this approach has the possibility of helping to bring about unity in the realm of religion.

The second principle is this: Make it as sure as you can. You may recognize this as a phrase of scripture. We find it in Matt. 27:65 where Pilate said to the Pharisees when they asked to make the tomb of Christ secure, "Ye have a guard: go, make it as sure as ye can." While Pilate was speaking of something very different from that of which we are now thinking, I would borrow his expression, for I believe it to be very wise in all matters of importance to "make it as sure as you can." Whether it is a matter of one's own physical health, or the protecting of one's home or automobile through insurance, or the securing of the best possible education for your children, or any one of a number of other items, I believe that it is basically wise to choose the alternative that is most sure, most certain and most solid. This principle must apply in the realm of religion, for our relationship to God is the most important thing in our lives. Above all other areas, we need to make our relationship to God as certain and as sure as we can.

Applying Our Principles

With these two basic principles in mind--"Deal with only one thing at a time" and "Make it as sure as you can"--let us examine some of the points on which sincere, dedicated religious people differ. Let's begin by taking the subject of baptism. Immediately, we have to

subdivide our subject and take only one specific aspect. Let's begin with the question of whether baptism is necessary for salvation or not. Let's look at this and decide it before we turn to anything else. Now, let's make it as sure as we can.

With the Bible as our authority, we begin by reading John 3:5, where our Lord said, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Next, we go to Acts 2:38 where on Pentecost after Peter had preached a great sermon concerning the divinity of Christ, the people were pricked in their hearts and asked, "Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." We then turn to Acts 22:16, where Saul of Tarsus is pictured as having spent three days and three nights in penitent fasting and prayer after having believed upon the Lord as the divine Savior. The God-sent preacher, Ananias, came to Saul and said, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." We close our quick survey by reading Peter's statement in I Peter 3:21, where he says, "Which also after a true likeness doth now save you, even baptism, not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the interrogation (or appeal) of a good conscious toward God.

Now that we have spotlighted this one aspect of baptism, which is the safer, surer way? Is the ground more solid when one believes that he is saved without being baptized, or is the ground more solid when he believes that being baptized is one of the elements expected and required by the Lord? When it is a yes or no, plus or minus, affirmative or negative reaction to this one detailed point, I believe it is obvious that the safer ground is to say yes. The other position leaves one having a difficult time in explaining away the above statements of Holy Scripture.

What Is Baptism?

Let us look at another aspect of baptism. There are those who believe that baptism can be performed either by sprinkling water upon the forehead, or by immersing the entire body in water. Let us look at this specific point and make a safe, sure decision as to which is the more dependable alternative. In Acts 8:36-39, we read the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian nobleman. After Philip had preached a sermon concerning Christ, we read, "And as they went on the way, they came to a certain water; and the eunuch saith, Behold, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thy heart thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still; and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water ..." This element of going down into and coming up out of water is also seen in the baptism of the Lord himself, for Matt. 3:16 reads, "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway from the water ..." Only immersion really requires a going down into and a coming up out of water, which has its implications as to what the act of baptism is.

However, we would not stop our search at this point. Let us look next at Romans 6:3-5, where the apostle Paul says, "Or are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried, therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." Here we see that baptism has an element in it that is like a burial and a resurrection. Only immersion seems to fill this requirement. We conclude, therefore, that immersion is the safest, surest, most dependable of the alternatives.

Infant Baptism

We look next at still another facet of the subject of baptism. Is it scriptural to baptize infants? Many good people have believed so, while others have believed not. How can we achieve unity on this point? As we turn to the scriptures, we remember that some have reasoned that when the scriptures on three occasions use the word "household," infants are probably included. The first of these cases is that of Cornelius in Acts 10. This text indicates clearly that the occupation soldier of the Roman army in addition to his family, had both servants and soldiers under his direct command. On the occasion in question when Peter arrived, Cornelius called his household together and presented them to Peter with these words, "Now therefore we are all here present in the sight of God, to hear all things that have been commended thee of the Lord." (Acts 10:33). Notice "we are all here ... to hear." We have no indication that there were any present who were so young that they could not hear the gospel which Peter then proceeded to preach, after which they were baptized into Christ.

The second example is in Acts 16, where we read of Lydia, the seller of purple in the city of Philippi. This businesswoman had a household of workers who assisted her in her selling of purple cloth. We do not even know that she was married, much less that she had infants in her household. The third example of the word household is in Acts 16, also where we read of the conversion of the Philippian jailor. After he had asked his question, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" and Silas responded, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou all thy house. And they spake the word of the Lord unto him, with all that were in his house ..." After they had heard, believed and been baptized, the passage closes with the words, "And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God." (Acts 16:30-34). Notice that all the household heard the word, were baptized, and rejoiced.

The safe, sure position is that when children are old enough to hear the gospel with understanding and believe it with genuineness, they are then old enough to be baptized. As we scan the other examples of New Testament conversion, we find that in every case

baptism was believer's baptism. This fits with the charge that Jesus had given to his apostles on the occasion of his ascension into heaven, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall he condemned." (Mark. 16:15-16).

The Lord's Supper

Next, let's apply our two basic principles to the question of how often the Lord's Supper should be eaten. Equally earnest and devout believers have held that it should be eaten weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually, or sometimes even more than once a week. What indication do we receive from the scriptures? After the church began on Pentecost the only time-indication is found in Acts 20:7, where we read, "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered to break bread. Paul discoursed with them ..." The previous verse indicated that he had remained at Troas for seven days, even though he was on a journey to Jerusalem for the Passover. The indication is that he had waited this length of time in order to have opportunity to meet with the disciples and to break bread, which obviously in the context means to eat the Lord's Supper. Justin Martyr and other uninspired early writers in the church indicate that it was the common practice of New Testament Christians to eat the Lord's Supper on the first day of each week. Admittedly, the scriptural evidence is meager, but if we are to make a decision upon the basis of which is the safest or surest, how can we do better than to follow the example of the apostle Paul?

Instrumental Music

Let's use our two principles upon the question of whether Christians are to worship with instruments of music accompanying their singing. A study of the Old Testament clearly indicates that instrumental music was approved under the Law of Moses in the temple worship. We find, among other passages, the 150th Psalm which reads, "Praise ye Jehovah ... Praise him with trumpet sound: praise him with psaltery and harp. Praise him with timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and pipe."

In looking into the New Testament, however, we do not find that the instruments of music which were common in the Old Testament worship were used in Christian worship. Strangely, the early Christians sang without the use of their familiar instruments of accompaniment. This is indicated in passages like Eph. 5:19, where the text reads, "Speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing, and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Hebrews 13:15 speaks of offering up "the fruit of lips which make confession to his name." Just why the early Christians did not use instruments in their worship, we are only left to conjecture.

On this point many of us feel that the safest, surest position is to leave off everything for which we do not have authorization in the New Testament scriptures either by direct command, or by approved apostolic example, or by necessary inference. If the heartfelt, earnest worship of the Christians during apostle-guided times was most effective with simple a cappella singing, we believe that likely that the same is true today.

Conclusion

We have suggested two simple principles that we believe will help us in achieving a foundation upon which all of us can stand together. Let us determine only one thing at a time and let us make each thing as sure and certain as we can. We do this first of all because we love God and want to follow his directions as completely as possible. We do it also because we love God and want to follow his directions as completely as possible. We do it also because we want to be saved in the final judgment, and know that the safest surest way is the wisest way. May we join in prayer and in unceasing effort to the end that we may all stand in one great army of the Lord and all march one way.