

## RELIGIOUS UNITY: IS IT POSSIBLE?

That Jesus desires unity of all who believe on Him (John 17:20,21) is a fact that no Bible believer can deny. However, it is readily observed that division exists among those who profess faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God. Many even look upon such division as a good thing. They say it is good to have all the different churches teaching different doctrines so that each person can "join the church of his or her choice."

Those who promote and encourage such fail to realize that this division is contrary to all that the Bible teaches. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to "*all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you*" (1 Corinthians 1:10). This is the only way unity can exist. As long as you have men teaching and believing different doctrines there will be division.

It is a simple thing to say that the only way we can have unity is for all to speak the same thing. It is another matter for this to become a reality. As noted, some do not even believe that being divided is a bad thing. Others, who recognize that division is bad and unity is to be desired, are convinced that obtaining that unity is an impossibility. Is it possible for all believers to be united? If so, how can this unity be achieved?

Some have determined that the only way unity can be achieved is by everyone agreeing to disagree. This is not the unity Jesus prayed for. This is not the unity Paul besought the Corinthians to have. The unity Jesus prayed for was unity of all who believed on Him through the apostles' word (John 15:20). I read an article several years ago entitled "Christ's Unanswered Prayer." The author of that article noted the existence of all the different religious groups teaching different doctrines as evidence that Christ's prayer for the oneness of all believers had not been answered. I do not believe that Christ's prayer is unanswered. He prayed that all who believe on Him through the apostles' word or doctrine would be one. Division results when men do not believe on Him through the apostles' word.

The early disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine (Acts 2:42). As a result they were together (Acts 2:44) and were of one accord (Acts 2:46). The same is true today. All who continue in the apostles' doctrine are united with all others who do likewise. Division results when someone turns from that doctrine.

Some will say, "But you are not going to get everyone to believe the same thing or teach the same thing." This may be true but is it due to it being impossible for all to believe the same thing or is it due to their refusal to believe the same thing? What is taught in the word of God that all can not believe?

The Bible teaches that the disciples were called Christians and that it is in this name we glorify God (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16). Many today are wearing names other than or in addition to the name Christian. As a result men are divided by the name or names they wear. To abide in the word of Christ (John 8:31) we can not wear names not found therein. What about the name you wear in religion? Can it be found in the word of God?

In the first century, when men and women heard, believed and obeyed the teaching of the apostles they received the remission of sins and were added by the Lord to the church. No differing denominations existed. They were Christians and as such, were His church (Acts 11:26). If we today hear the same message they heard, believe the same as they did and obey the same thing they obeyed what will we be? If they could hear, believe and obey the gospel and not become a member of any denomination then why can't we do likewise? In fact, to become a member of any denomination one must believe and obey something other than the Bible. If a person accepts the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice then he must reject all denominational doctrines since they can not be found in the word of God.

Yes, religious unity is possible, but we must be willing to reject the doctrines and commandments of men and put our faith in God and His word. If we will do so we will be speaking the same thing and there will be no division (1 Corinthians 1:10).

✍ James Hahn