

# Unity, the Christian, and the Church

## Introduction

The basis for all fellowship is our common Christian relationship with God in Christ. To quote 1 John 1:3 fully: "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you *that ye also may have fellowship with us*; and truly *our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*." Fellowship or κοινωνία is based, not on mutual understanding of non-redemptive doctrine, but on a mutual Father, a mutual Savior, and a mutual Spirit.

## Christian unity, Election, and Christian Foundations

Although the words "elect," "election," "chosen," etc. have summoned up controversy again and again in church history, the least we can say with reference to the New Testament and election is that this theme brings all Christians into a sphere of unity because all are seen in this manner (i.e. "elect"). Whether a Christian is new in the Lord or old; whether there are points of theological difference, ALL the people of God are seen individually and corporately as elect, which gives them an equal standing - which in turn promotes Christian unity.

Note the following: as an individual Paul was "separated... from his (my) mother's whom...to reveal His (God's) Son in me (Gal 1:15-16). Rufus is "chosen in the Lord" (Rom 16:13), John writes "to the elect Lady" (2 John 1), and Jacob was elect before birth, having done neither good nor evil (Rom 9:11).

Churches are seen in like manner. Paul says of the Corinthians that they were a chosen people neither wise, noble, nor strong (1 Cor 1:26ff). Paul could see in the Thessalonians their election (1 Thess 1:4-5), and the Ephesians saints were chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4).

Most important of all, Christians in general are given the title "elect" in many New Testament passages. Again I say this not to start a debate but to solidify the equality of Christians toward the end goal of Christian unity - that is, oneness in Christ. We are called "God's elect" (Rom 8:33; Tit 1:1), "the elect of God" (Col 3:12), and "a chosen generation" (1 Pet 2:9). God "chose us from the beginning to salvation" (2 Thess 2:13) and Paul declared he endured all things "for the sake of God's elect" (2 Tim 2:10).

## Christian Unity, the Cross, and our new Life

All themes of the supernatural life that is imparted to a sinner begin with the love of Jesus Christ. What a deep and unfathomable subject! Christ died for our sins (1 Cor 15:3); Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6); He gave His life a ransom for many (Mt 20:28); He laid down His life for the sheep (Jn 10:11), or quite simply, He gave Himself for us (Tit 2:14). Christ abolished death, and brought life and immortality to life (2 Tim 1:10). He sought us - as the shepherd the sheep, the woman the coin, and the father the son (Lk 15).

Further, the Word says of the regenerate New Testament saints that "ALL shall know me (the Lord)." ALL the blessings of the New Covenant are bestowed on ALL the people of God: *regeneration*, "I will write my laws upon their hearts;" *sanctification*, "for they shall all know me, from the least to the greatest;" *adoption*, "I will be their God;" and *remission/forgiveness*, "their sins and iniquities I shall remember no more."

Now the cross of Christ and the Spirit's indwelling are true of all the saints of God. Not only is every Christian "elect," but all saints are elect through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Saints both have the love of Christ and communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). We have the blood of forgiveness and the indwelling Spirit. **This is the basis of fellowship and communion in Christianity. We have the same Lord, we have the same Spirit (Eph 4:3,5).**

### Christian Unity and the Family of God

There is "family" terminology that touches the core of our relationship as Christians. It is unfortunate that the doctrine of the "universal" church has arisen to negate the proper realm of "body life" in the local assembly (as any perusal of the New Testament will show, "church" inevitably refers to a local congregation).

The New Testament's "universal" vocabulary which binds us together in Christ is "family" vocabulary.

#### **Note; by faith in Jesus Christ:**

We are sons and daughters of God, 2 Cor 6:18

We are all brethren, Matt 23:9

Those older men in the Lord are fathers, 1 Tim 5:1

Those older women in the Lord are mothers, 1 Tim 5:2

Those younger women in the Lord are sisters, 1 Tim 5:2

We are all adopted as children, and have an inheritance in heaven, Eph 1:5,14

We are all of the household of faith, Gal 6:10

We are all in the family of God, Eph 3:15

### Christian Unity - *κοινωνία* or "fellowship" of Saints & the Church

Fellowship and unity are not radically serious concepts in the church today. In the first century it was not so. Subsequent to Pentecost, the new converts "continued steadfastly in the apostles...fellowship," Acts 2:42. When persecuted, they "lifted up their voice to God with one accord," Acts 4:24. When they assembled together to pray, the place they were in was shaken by God, Acts 4:31, and when acts of disunity arose, God arose to deal with it (Acts 5:1ff).

The verb and noun forms of *κοινωνία*/fellowship are broad and interesting. Most important, **ALL** Christian are involved in this *κοινωνία*. The word itself is variously translated as "contribution," Rom 15:26; "fellowship," 1 Cor 1:9; "communion," 2 Cor 6:14; "partner," 2 Cor 8:23; and "companions,"

Heb 10:33. We share fellowship or "communication" in our faith, communion of the body of Christ, communion of the Holy Spirit, partners in glory, and fellowship of ministry, Plm 6; 1 Cor 10:16; 2 Cor 13:14; 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Cor 8:4.

### Christian Unity, Diversity - Rom 12/1 Cor 12 & the Church

Although the Lord has determined to save sinners from every tribe, tongue, nation, etc., He has determined just as clearly to bring them together - in their diversity - to edify one another in the unity of gospel faith.

Thus in Romans 12, although there is many members (12:4) and diversity of gifts (12:6), the body of Christ was to be one in their diversity of people and gifts. Paul exhorted the Roman Christians that they were "one body" (12:4,5), "members one of another" (12:5), and in the diversity of gifts and their exercise they were to "love without dissimulation" and "be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love," (12:9,10). They were to be "of the same mind," and "in honor, preferring one another," (12:16,10).

1 Corinthians 12 echo's the sentiments of Romans 12. The Christian body "is one," with "one Spirit" baptizing all, (12:12-13). In the one body there were many members, and thus much diversity (12:14). Some had great gifts, and some not, but "God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: **that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another**" (12:24-25).

And all has been done as it has pleased God (12:11,18)!

### Christianity and Christ's Commands to Unity

In looking at our Lord's will, we must remind ourselves that the "Great Commission" had Christ's followers; 1) going (to preach) 2) making disciples, 3) baptizing and 4) teaching the new converts whatsoever I COMMAND YOU. We are apt because of our Puritan background to think of command as the ten at Sinai. But the Lord's COMMANDS are a common theme in the New Testament (1 Cor 7:10; 14:37; 1 Thess 4:2; 2 Thess 3:6,12; 2 Pet 3:2).

Thus, Jesus Christ our Lord COMMANDS us to "love one another," Jn 13:34; 15:12,17 and to be one as He and the Father are one, Jn 17:11, 21-23. In this manner there will be beauty in the Church (Ps 133:1).