

## RELIGIOUS UNITY

Raymond Elliott

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; “that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (NKJV, John 17:20, 21). In the Lord’s Prayer there are several things that are quite evident: 1. Jesus’ concern for His apostles. 2. Not only for His apostles but for all who would believe in Him. 3. That this belief would come through the apostles’ doctrine. 4. That there would and could be unity among all such believers. 5. This unity would have a tremendous impact on the unbelieving world.

One of the most difficult things for modern man to accept and understand is that God intended for all believers to be united in religious matters. If this is not the case then our Lord prayed a deceptive prayer, knowing all the time that he was praying for something that was not possible. But our Lord knew that men could be united if we followed the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 2:42). Unity of teaching cannot help but to produce unity of believers. There cannot be unity in diversity of doctrine and beliefs. Each separate and distinct religious organization exists today because of a distinctive and different doctrine. This is in direct contradiction to the Lord’s sentiments expressed in His prayer to the Father. We can also know the mind of God and the desire of the Holy Spirit in this matter through the inspired scriptures.

God hates “he that sows discord among brethren” (Proverbs 6:16-19). The apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit wrote in I Corinthians 1:10: “Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Paul instructed early Christians in this manner: “Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). We know that “God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints” (I Corinthians 14:33). We must conclude therefore that religious division exists today, not because of God’s desire: rather, it is man’s unwillingness to be guided by the sole authority in religious matters and as found in the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16, 17). It seems odd that we accept the fact that the government has written a book for the Postal Service to use in the setting of prices regarding the sending of mail and packages, but, we reject the thought that God, in His infinite wisdom, has given us a divine book which can unite believers in his Son Jesus Christ.

Our Heavenly Father has not left us without direction in this matter of religious unity. The Holy Spirit had the apostle Paul make a plea to the first century Christians

to “Give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). It should be the desire of every believer to contribute to unity and not disunity in religious affairs. This unity is possible if we subscribe to the Spirit’s platform as follows: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). These are seven basic truths that will unite all believers if all follow them in our heart and in our practice.