

## Church - Christian Unity

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### What is the truth that produces Christian unity?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

**There is only one basis for true Christian unity: "regeneration and belief of the truth." Anything else, as Martyn Lloyd-Jones stated, "is clearly a fraud and a lie." Evangelicals need to regain a firm grasp of this vital reality.**

In our current series of questions and answers we are discussing the issue of Christian unity — how to achieve and maintain it, and just as importantly, how *not* to do it — using Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' landmark 1962 speech to a British ministerial fellowship as our outline.

Today, spokesmen for various movements around the globe are calling for unity on many un-Biblical footings. The position of increasing numbers of Evangelicals on this question is becoming alarmingly similar to those of liberal mainline-church ecumenicists and the Roman Catholic church.

#### Agreement on the Fundamentals

Answering similar calls for unity under false flags in his time, Dr. Lloyd-Jones stated that there is only one basis for true Christian unity, and that anything else "is clearly a fraud and a lie." He began to deal with this in his fourth and fifth points.

4. The starting point in considering the question of unity must always be regeneration and belief of the truth. Nothing else produces unity, and, as we have seen clearly, it is impossible apart from this.
5. An appearance or a façade of unity based on anything else, and at the expense of these two criteria, or which ignores them, is clearly a fraud and a lie. People

are not one, nor in a state of unity, who disagree about fundamental questions such as (a) whether we submit ourselves utterly to revealed truth or rely ultimately upon our reason and human thinking; (b) the historic fall, and man's present state and condition in sin, under the wrath of God, and in complete helplessness and hopelessness as regards salvation; and (c) the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the utter, absolute necessity, and sole sufficiency, of His substitutionary atoning work for sinners. To give the impression that they are one simply because of a common outward organization is not only to mislead the world which is outside the church [and those within as well, we would add] but to be guilty of a lie.<sup>1</sup>

### **Regeneration and Belief in the Truth are Inseparable**

Scripture clearly supports this position. Clearly, "regeneration and belief of the truth" are essential and inseparable. "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.....But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:14, 16).

### **Belief in the Historic Fall of Man**

TeachingTheWord president Paul M. Elliott has observed that belief in a literal, historical Genesis account of the creation of the universe and the Fall of man

is a key test case revealing the attitudes of theologians, pastors, elders, and church members toward the authority of Scripture and the proper approach to its interpretation. The test is simple: Will you believe what God has written in its plainly-understood sense, or will you say, with the serpent in the Garden, "Has God really said?" ...[W]ill you believe the Word of God, and bring every thought captive to it, or must you first pass God's Word through perspectival filters — principally the perspectives of unbelievers whose theories about origins reflect,

at their core, an unwillingness to acknowledge God as Creator and thus open the door to His claims upon them as His creatures?

In John 5:40 Jesus said to the Jews what is also true of these unbelievers: "But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life." In that same passage, Jesus tells them: "If you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?" The issue at that moment in the Gospel account was not the doctrine of creation, but the principle Jesus stated still applies. We are grossly inconsistent if we say that we believe the words of God the Son in the New Testament but do not believe the words of His inspired penmen in the Old. If we do not trust Moses' words given under the inspiration of the God the Holy Spirit, how can we say that we trust the words of God made flesh? Where do we draw such a dividing line, and who gives us the right to draw it?... God does not.

For the pastor or teacher, the test posed by the doctrine of creation is even more pointed: Will you be consistent in your attitude toward the Word of God from beginning to end, or will you lead those under your care into the swamp of equivocation? Are you willing to take a stand that is contrary to the false wisdom of this world, and thus be identified with the One who said in the same passage, "I do not receive honor from men"? Are you willing to be such an example to the people of God, by exposing yourself to the criticism of the world?<sup>2</sup>

### **Belief in the Person and Work of Christ**

Belief in the person and work of Jesus Christ — His deity, His virgin birth, His sinless life, His full atonement for sin, the imputation of His righteousness to undeserving sinners cursed under the Fall, His present rule and intercession, His coming again to

judge the living and the dead — is likewise essential. This is, as Dr. James White has said, what it means to be truly Protestant:

It is my firm conviction that "Protestant" means absolutely, positively nothing unless the one wearing the term believes, breathes, lives, and loves the uncompromised, offensive-to-the-natural-man message of justification by God's free grace by faith in Jesus Christ alone. As the term has become institutionalized, it has lost its meaning. In the vast majority of instances today a Protestant has no idea what the word itself denotes, what the historical background behind it was, nor why he should really care. And a label that has been divorced from its significance no longer functions in a meaningful fashion. We need a Reformation in our day that will again draw the line clearly between those who embrace the Gospel of God's grace in Christ and those who do not. And how one answers the question "How is a man made right with God?" determines whether one embraces that Gospel or not.<sup>3</sup>

### **How Must We Deal with Those Who Do Not Submit to the Truth?**

Submission "utterly" to the revealed truth of God's Word must be our starting point — and our ending point as well. How, then, are we to deal with those who will not submit to the truth — even those who call themselves Evangelicals, and profess faith in Christ? We shall turn to that question in our [next article](#).

### **References:**

1. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Basis of Christian Unity," in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 161.
2. Paul M. Elliott, *Christianity and Neo-Liberalism* (Unicoi, Tennessee: The Trinity Foundation, 2005), 268-269.

3. James R. White, *The God Who Justifies* (Bloomington, Minnesota: Bethany House Publishers, 2001), 36.

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