

The Need for Unity In the Body Of Christ

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The Structure and Flaws of Doctrine

I want to speak to you about doctrine. Hold it! Don't put this book down. This will not be boring. In fact, it may surprise you and start your mental juices flowing.

First we shall define "doctrine" as the basic official beliefs of a religious group. We need to remember that in any group, religious or otherwise, there will be members who differ with the official line, usually in minor matters. This should not be a cause for alarm. There probably is no unity of thought within any religious or secular group. When the difference is on a major issue, *if the differing party is sure of his stand, he ought to try for a reasonable length of time to smooth out the doctrinal wrinkles.* And he should do it in a spirit of love and not contention.

We the Oneness Pentecostals have a doctrine to which we cling. It is in many respects a good doctrine, but, as with any other group's set of beliefs, it has its flaws. For the sake of clarity, let's liken our doctrine to a building in the process of construction. Our spiritual fathers erected their section of the building on the sections that the fathers before them had built. The entire superstructure, as we might call it, rests on the solid foundation laid by the doctrine of Jesus and the Apostles. We are now building on the latest section (inherited from our immediate fathers), based on what God has revealed and is revealing to us. At times we respectfully remove, from the section our fathers left to us, erroneous ideas as a builder might take out a flawed brick or other construction material that is ill-suited for the building. The fathers did not realize while they lived that a particular brick was not strong enough to be incorporated in the structure.

Despite the inevitable doctrinal mistakes made by each generation of builders, which were due to their not possessing the greater knowledge and revelation that God would give to future generations,

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our fathers built well before us. In doing so, they too had to take out defective material from the section that was left to them, material that was not suitable for the work. I have seen this happen more than once or twice. Ever since the foundation was laid – laid flawlessly, I should add – by Christ and the Apostles, no new generation of builders has structured their section perfectly. You cannot expect perfection from imperfect builders. Of course Jesus, the corner stone of the foundation, was perfect and He built perfectly. The twelve Apostles (including Paul and disregarding Matthias – I do not believe the Apostles were Spirit-led when they selected Matthias; they were definitely not Spirit-filled at the time) laid the rest of the foundation and were given special grace by God that would preclude any error in doctrine. Yet, despite human error that has inevitably crept in since then, if each generation of sincere builders after Jesus and the Apostles corrects the innocent errors of the preceding generation, we will one day, perhaps, have the perfect, complete doctrinal structure that God wants.

We have knowledgeable people contributing to the work, people who do not always see exactly eye-to-eye. But the differences are small and they are good men and women who have the love of God in them, so they work together in harmony. For instance, if Joe Bloke should think that there are three persons in the Godhead while John Brown can conceive of only one person, it can remain of minimal importance as long as they agree firmly there is only ONE God. Yet at times the doctrinal disagreements grow beyond the embryonic stage and become major issues with which the group has to deal.

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For further information on this matter, you may purchase a pamphlet, *The Need for Unity in the Body of Christ*. Cut and paste the following into your browser: <http://www.lulu.com/content/3402957>

"Hedging" Our Bets

I think we who are of the Apostolic-Pentecostal persuasion tend to be like the Israelites of old. In our sincere efforts to protect the truth, which never changes, we have erected a hedge of man-ordained practices and pseudo doctrines around it. We have failed to understand that the theology of an individual or a group has to grow because it is never a perfect entity. Men and women are imperfect, consequently their theology is necessarily flawed in this respect or that. A sincerely held view of God does not need to remain static simply to prove its authenticity; it does not have to be fixed and unmovable. A sincerely held belief is vibrant and capable of growth –otherwise it will become stagnant and dead.

As God gave fuller truth to us the “chosen people,” some of us have stiffened our necks and become determined to live in the past. In that same past the mainline denominations, other than some of their outstanding leaders, were seriously devoid of “heart.” They were like a group of children playing church. They were not taught to be in dead earnest about their salvation, and too many of them had a tendency to be morally permissive and vague in their doctrine. In our shock and horror at such spiritual ineptness and in order to protect the truth of God, we erected a hedge around the truth similar to what the Israelites of old did in trying to safeguard the Law of Moses. And our hedge was like that of the Israelites: it was specious, having a show of plausibility but no solid base on which to stand.

Now, in looking back on those days, we concede the so-called hedge might have been good for that time, but it was not Scripture-based and God certainly did not mean for His people to be forever bound by laws and precepts not of His making. I believe that God in any

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period of time gives His pastors and leaders wisdom and a certain amount of latitude in dealing with individual situations and persons. In order to keep the people under their charge from indulging in the sins and doctrinal fallacies of the day, the pastors of the various Oneness congregations erected a hedge consisting of what they sincerely believed to be necessary restraints. They forbade this, they forbade that; their parishioners could not dance, they could not go to movies nor could they use innocuous slang and their socializing was limited mainly to their fellow believers. And many other restrictions were employed to be sure we were “separate.”

In most instances the leaders and pastors were not being control freaks; they were earnestly trying to keep their followers from the ills of the denominational churches and they were doing what they thought was required for the purity of the doctrine. For instance, the average Trinitarian (not the learned theologian) thought there were actually three separate Gods! We knew better, so we had to protect the truth by erecting a protective hedge around it.

As the truth was revealed to the average Trinitarian about the oneness of God, we Oneness adherents could not accept that their theology was growing and we continued to flail at the man of straw we thought was real. They had moved on, but we still saw the Trinitarians as poor benighted fumlbers after the truth – a truth they had now accepted and from which starting point they were moving ahead. Meanwhile we Oneness believers kept the hedge erected about the truth as we saw it. We who had previously had a truth the average Trinitarian did not have, were now mired in the past, tilting at windmills of our own imagination.

It Is Time to Dismantle the Hedge

But there was some progress here and there. A few brave pastors realized that going to the movies was not a sin if the movie was wholesome. Dancing was not a sin if the dancing was not lewd and sensual. Socializing was all right if one remembered to keep oneself separate from the sins inherent in some forms of socializing. Many

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pastors, however, were reluctant to accept this evolution in theology; their thinking and their theology remained firmly fixed in the past.

In the meantime the Trinitarian was moving ahead. 1) He learned and accepted the truth about the oneness of God; 2) He also learned from the Scriptures that when a person gives himself wholeheartedly to God, he receives the Holy Spirit at that moment; and 3) He learned more about the will of God and how to involve it in his personal life. For further detail, please purchase or download [free] God's Grand Plan of Salvation by Aaron J. Smith:

(<http://www.lulu.com/content/380497>)

Two of the three things above had been the prime separators between the Trinitarians and the Oneness people. They were: 1) the belief in the oneness of God and 3) becoming personally engaged in the fulfillment of the will of God, Now, however, the two camps believed alike. And so there was no longer any dispute between the religious parties? Unfortunately, yes, there was.

An Obstacle to Unity Remains

Now the bone of contention was, and still is, on how and when a believer receives the Holy Spirit. The Oneness group maintains that when the Spirit comes into a person's heart, he or she will speak in other tongues. They allow no exception to this rule. The Trinitarians contend that the Spirit comes into the person without any necessary outward sign; it is an inner phenomenon. Again I refer you to the pamphlet, *God's Grand Plan of Salvation*, <http://www.lulu.com/content/380497>. It gives more detail on the differences between the groups.

But there are a few of us Oneness people who are fully aware that the Holy Ghost does not have to announce His coming into our hearts by speaking through us in other tongues and we also are convinced that when the Spirit comes He will demonstrate His presence by producing the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the believer.

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“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.” (Gal 5:22-23)

We are also familiar with the scriptures below that inform us,

“But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. (Joh 1:12-13 RSV)

and...

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom 8:14)

But the majority of us are quick to say (as though it settled all things), “The fathers believed” such and so. Now this presents an interesting situation. The “fathers” were not perfect in knowledge or in their theology. Their theology was shaped by what they had been taught and they too said, before we later latched onto it as one of our favorite mantras, “The fathers said, the fathers said.” We need to forget “what the fathers said,” and ask ourselves, “What does the Word of God say?” Truth does not change with the customs of men. The knowledge that is inherent in God is alone unchanging and vibrant and alive.

Our Theology Has to Grow

Our knowledge is light years short of being perfect and it has to grow. If we resist growing in knowledge we are apt to become cesspools and the living waters that once sprang up within us may become stagnant and toxic. As a case in point, the Israelites were blessed with manna that came down from above, but when they attempted to hoard the heavenly food, it bred worms and stank. We cannot afford to clutch to our bosoms the old knowledge, which was once so wonderful, and refuse further enlightenment – we will wither on the vine and be cast out as worthless trash.

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The Next Move Is Up to Us

The ball is now in the court of the Oneness believers. We are the ones who withdrew ourselves from our brothers and sisters. We wanted to have no part with them; and of course in those days back in the early years of the twentieth century, reaching perhaps up into the 1970's, there was a disparity between what many denominational members did and what they professed to believe. But that was yesterday. Today I am seeing so much of love and outreach and worship and praise among the Trinitarians that I am truly impressed. "By their fruits ye shall know them," and they are producing the all-important fruit of the Spirit. *They are working out their salvation*: they are taking the truth and living it in their daily lives

What we Oneness believers have to do now is hark back to the hallmark of the Christian: we have to show our Trinitarian brothers the love that we profess to have. We all believe in the same God; we all believe in the oneness of God; we all believe in living a godly life and we all trust in the Bible, in its original form, as the inerrant Word of God. So what are we Oneness people going to do? What can we do as Christians except to love our brothers and sisters and fellowship with them?

I am a realist. I know there will never be one huge global congregation in which everybody believes exactly the same thing. There will always be various congregations with varying minor shades of belief, even within the respective Trinitarian and Oneness camps. But we have to accentuate the positives: We all have one God, one Savior and one Gospel of salvation. We all expect the soon coming of our ONE God and Savior Jesus Christ. This should be enough to eradicate the contentions between brethren and sisters so that we can together work to save lost souls all around us and make their formerly sin-ridden lives a resounding praise to God.

