

A UNITY TO ATTAIN

For some time I have thought that our magazine needs to turn a corner, and I believe the time has come to do just that.

The year 2006 was an historic year. Beginning with Restoration Forum XXIV at Abilene Christian University in February, continuing with the International Soul Winning Workshop at Tulsa in March, and culminating with the historic North American Christian Convention in June (see Fall 2006 *One Body*), I believe we have turned an important corner.

For 23 years we have tried to do our best to fulfill the biblical mandate to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3 NIV). There is a unity to maintain. Now I believe it is time to set our sights on the other kind of unity Paul wrote about—a unity to attain. “Until we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13 NASB).

You may have already noticed the slight but significant change in our motto on the masthead of this magazine: Until we all attain to the unity of the faith.

I am pleased that this journal has done a good job of maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I would like for us now to turn our collective efforts to attaining the unity of the faith. I found it interesting that Adam Clark defined “the faith” in Ephesians 4:13 as “the Christian system”—the very title of Alexander Campbell’s landmark book. Campbell’s sub-title was instructive: “In reference to the union of Christians, and a restoration of the primitive Christianity, as pled in the current reformation.” Albert Barnes commented on Ephesians 4:13 as follows: “Till we all hold to the same truths.”

There are truths we ought to be addressing “with one voice.” These are truths “surely believed among us.” We need to have unanimity among us regarding these truths.

I was rather stunned to read in *The Southeast Outlook* (August 24, 2006) the following statistics gathered by The Barna Group and *Newsweek* magazine. This is what church youth believe.



- 70% of church youth do not believe absolute moral truth exists.
- 63% do not believe Jesus is the Son of the one, true God.
- 51% do not believe Jesus rose from the dead.
- 65% do not believe Satan is a real entity.
- 68% do not believe the Holy Spirit is a real entity.
- 58% believe all faiths teach equally valid truths.
- 64% believe a person can earn his place in heaven if they are good enough.
- 64% believe Christ came to earth only to teach bad people how to live better.
- 68% believe salvation can be obtained by someone who has differing religious beliefs.
- 72% believe you can tell if something is ethically/morally right for you by whether or not it works in your life.

Again, this is what *churched* young people believe. If for no other reason than them (our precious children and grandchildren) we ought to be seeking to attain the unity of the faith. But then there is the world that is waiting for the church to speak with one voice.

Recently I came across a quote from Irenaeus (ca. 125-200). Irenaeus, whose name means “peaceful,” studied under Polycarp, who himself was a disciple of the apostle John. He defended the faith against the Gnostics and wrote a classic, *Against Heresies*. But I digress. Here is what he said about “the unity of the faith” in the second century. *All teach one and the same God and Father, and believe the same economy of the incarnation of the Son of God, and know the same gift of the Spirit, and meditate on the same precepts, and maintain the same form of constitution with respect to the church, and look for the same coming of the Lord, and wait for the same salvation of the whole man — that is, of soul and body.*

Note that he uses the word “same” seven times. If it’s all the same to you, I think that sounds pretty sane. Sane enough for 21st century Christians. To think, believe and act otherwise would be, I don’t know, insane?

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