

Truth Or Unity?

by Staff

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We all want to be known as seekers of the truth. None of us would want to follow a lie! Yet oftentimes, searching for the truth brings us into conflict with others' beliefs, causing separations between brethren in the church of God. This is not to say that we should reject truth as it is revealed to us. But at the same time, we must be sure not to destroy the unity of the spirit by endorsing beliefs that are contrary to church doctrine.

We all readily recall such phrases as "[one] who seeks the truth" (Jeremiah 5:1), "plead for truth" (Isaiah 59:4), "valiant for the truth" (Jeremiah 9:3), "desire truth" (Psalm 51:6), "love of the truth" (II Thessalonians 2:10), "know the truth" (John 8:32), "walk in . . . truth" (Psalm 86:11) and "make known [God's] truth" (Isaiah 38:19). The Bible frequently speaks of truth in a context where people do "not obey the truth" (Galatians 3:1), "were not straightforward about the truth" (Galatians 2:14), "resist the truth" (II Timothy 3:8), "turn their ears away from the truth" (II Timothy 4:4), and "turn from the truth" (Titus 1:14).

Another verse—one not quite as readily on the lips of many truth-seekers—is just as compelling: "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" (I Corinthians 1:10). We cannot scratch this verse from the Bible, but today we find it ignored quite frequently.

Surely, our great God's laws are not so contradictory that to obey Him and seek the truth we have to transgress another of His commands: "speak the same thing"! Yet how many have not been able to reconcile these two biblical concepts in recent years!

In Conflict With Unity

Any time a seeker of truth introduces a "new truth" to a friend in the church—unless the truth he has just discovered also agrees with church doctrine—he finds himself in conflict with the plain scriptural command that *all* in the church must speak the same thing. Unity is so vital to the church that the apostle Paul backs this command with authority from our Savior: "I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ"!

The one who introduces a new truth often conveniently chooses to ignore this troublesome scripture, and in the name of "truth" and "love of truth" ventures to speak something that is *not "the same thing"* as what all the rest of his brethren speak! As soon as he accepts this new truth, he no longer agrees with his fellows—he no longer satisfies the godly requirement of being "perfectly joined together in the same mind."

Through his departure from established truth, he has effectively removed himself from God's called-out ones, who all speak the same thing. How tragic! Satan the Devil has successfully incited the truth-seeker's pride and tempted him to commit a terrible sin in the name of a good cause. Beware of his subtlety! "Seeking truth" may cost a Christian his eternal life!

There is, of course, a right way to be a truth-seeker without doing violence to God's charge to refrain from damaging the church's unity of the spirit. Many have never been taught the proper method, and naturally, Satan has also contrived a counterfeit way of truth-seeking.

Paul speaks of those who are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (II Timothy 3:7). He also describes truth-seekers with itching ears, who looking for the truth end up listening to and believing fables (II Timothy 4:3). Obviously, this is Satan's false method.

But those seekers who *live* God's way (Psalm 111:10; cf. 119:151) will *love* the precious truth that the Father in heaven presents to them at their calling. They will take the steps necessary to preserve this priceless truth bestowed upon them by teachers in God's church. At conversion they also receive a love of God's truth, and their love of that saving truth will guard their minds against devising new, different beliefs for themselves.

Those who have even an inkling of just how far our thoughts are from God's thoughts will busy themselves acquiring the mind of Christ at all costs. Unfortunately, many people, after encountering God's truth, follow a deceiver who questions and doubts every doctrine that God has ever revealed to His church. Maybe they received the truth but not the *love of the truth* (I Thessalonians 2:10).

For many, seeking the truth sadly progresses to turning away from the high calling that their loving God gave them. We have seen this transition to apostasy happen to many of our brethren with increasing intensity during the past two decades. The strange thing is that we never think it could happen to *US*.

Some have even left the church because after many years they discover that they do not agree with one of the church doctrines. Most likely, they have been "helped" in their discovery. They then "back up" their departure with Romans 14:23: "Whatever is not of faith is sin."

By so doing they do violence to the scriptural principle of unity in God's church. We must not transgress the apostle Paul's command in II Timothy 3:14-15: "But as for you, *continue in the things which you have learned* and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them." He refers to the teaching that Timothy had received throughout his life from the true ministers of God inside the church.

The only time to disagree with church doctrine is when a deceiver takes over the church, waters down the revealed teaching, and changes the true doctrine into error. Then we must "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29; cf. 4:19) by following the apostle Paul's command to "*continue in the things which you have learned*," not accepting the weakened doctrine and heresies being introduced.

This command is so vital that God reinforces it in a number of places:

» "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).

» "Imitate me . . . brethren, remember me in all things *and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you*" (I Corinthians 11:1-2).

» "Brethren, *join in following my example*, and note *those who so walk*, as you have us for a pattern" (Philippians 3:17).

- » "*Continue* in the faith" (Colossians 1:23).
- » "Brethren, we urge you and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you abound more and more, *just as you received from us* how you ought to walk and to please God" (I Thessalonians 4:1).
- » "Brethren, *stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught*" (II Thessalonians 2:15).
- » "For you yourselves know how *you ought to follow us*" (II Thessalonians 3:7).
- » "Take heed to yourselves and to *the doctrine. Continue* in them" (I Timothy 4:16).
- » "*Hold fast* the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me" (II Timothy 1:13).
- » "*The things that you have heard from me . . .* commit these to faithful men" (II Timothy 2:2).
- » "We must give the more earnest heed to *the things we have heard*, lest we drift away" (Hebrews 2:1).
- » "*Let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.* If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father" (I John 2:24).
- » "*Hold fast what you have*, that no one may take your crown" (Revelation 3:11).

Correcting Doctrinal Errors

Which takes precedence: seeking truth or keeping church unity inviolate? Of what value is seeking truth if that very act damages God's church? In the end the very truth is that all in God's Family—the ones who overcome and qualify for God's Kingdom—will speak the same thing. "The truth" is simply that body of information, revealed by a loving God, which allows us to understand that all in God's Family are *united in speaking the same thing*, believing the same thing, standing up for the same thing, are excited about the same thing—"the same thing" being whatever is pleasing in His sight.

But what if we discover error in church doctrine? Until Christ returns there will be at least some error in God's church—even in some church doctrines. That is why we are urged to grow in grace and knowledge. However, there is a proper way to correct error in the church. Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong wrote in a "Personal" in the December 1976 *Good News*:

I will CHANGE whenever proved wrong. I will accept NEW TRUTH as often as PROVED to be new truth to me or the church. But I will not compromise with the truth!

In another "Personal" (*Good News*, April 1979) he elaborates:

Now suppose a member thinks he or she has found an error in our doctrines. HOW must you proceed? IF you have found truth, we all want to know and embrace it! But how

MUST you proceed? NEVER by trying to convince another member of your "finding," lest you fall guilty of Romans 16:17-18.

What, then?

Take it to your local minister or write to headquarters. What must a local pastor do? Send it to headquarters. If it is felt to be valid truth, it will be brought to me personally, and the LIVING CHRIST will make it clear to my mind!

Timing and procedure seem of essence here so that the biblical principles remain inviolate. Mr. Armstrong also explained in that "Personal" how Christ put the true doctrines into His end-time church by revealing them to an apostle who in turn taught them to the church. He also showed how each member has to come to understand each one of those very doctrines himself. Such growth is the kind of truth-seeking God requires, and it has *nothing* to do with originating contradictory doctrines.

Speaking the same thing is a qualification for membership in God's true church. It is easily possible for one to meet that qualification or requirement by following the procedure which Mr. Armstrong taught: Contain that truth, pass it only to the human church leader. Live by faith, believing that he will prayerfully examine your "finding," and if it is indeed scriptural, that he will introduce it at one time to all, so that all can correct the error simultaneously.

This procedure ensures that everyone speaks the same thing *before* a change is made and also *after* it! No violence is done to either principle of Scripture. The truth is not denied, error is corrected, **and** everyone speaks the same thing.

However, if some decide they cannot wait, if they start spreading their discovery to other members, they are in effect dividing the church, and God's Word demands that they be expelled from the body to protect its unity.

To meet the scriptural requirements of seeking the truth as well as upholding church unity, the discoverer of any new truth that contradicts existing church doctrine **must** discipline himself. He must wait until the servant of God rules on the matter. Only after the determination has been announced to the whole body can that new truth be freely shared with any of the brethren.

No wonder that dissident truth-seekers do not quote, "We all must speak the same thing"! Self-discipline and humility are difficult!

The excitement of discovering a new truth is very understandable and is always part of that "first love" of the truth which Christians experience when their eyes are first opened by God. Desiring to share it with our best friends is understandable, but unwise.

The Truth Is Revealed

Even the Father and His Son practice restraint in revealing truth to us! Jesus says *we* are His friends as long as we do whatever He commands us (John 15:14), yet He does not dump the whole truth on us upon conversion. He and the Father reveal it to us as we are ready for it.

Any truth He has not yet revealed to His church, He will reveal at the right time, when it is best for us. We do not want to misdirect our efforts to "get" truth which He has not yet revealed. "The secret

things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which *are revealed* belong to us" (Deuteronomy 29:29). He reveals truth so we may keep His laws.

We need not be anxious and fearful of missing out on truth as long as we keep up with the truth already revealed to God's true church. God is a living God; He is ever wakeful over His children (Psalm 121:3-4). Paul writes in Philippians 3:15-17 that if we, as we obey whatever truth we already understand, still exhibit spiritual deficiencies, then "God will reveal even this to [us]" (verse 15). He will reveal it in such a way that His church will not be damaged.

The desired result is that we all walk by the same rule, and all be of the same mind (verse 16), and that can only be accomplished if we obey verse 17: "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." We must not follow just anyone. Follow the servant of God whose life shows that he is following God!

Seeking the truth is not just seeking new doctrines; it is also seeking to gain a good understanding of known doctrines! Think back how many years it took until we really grasped certain truths. How about the mystery of His reproducing Himself in us! Yes, the truth is stranger than fiction! But one day during a Bible study, or while meditating on God's Word—eureka!—all of a sudden we "got it."

If our comfort level with certain truths is still not what it ought to be, be assured that the great God will make His truths real to us. He will do it in such a way that church unity—which He desires so much—will not be hurt.

We, as individuals, must see to it that each of us "keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3) "till we *all* come to the unity of the faith" (verse 13). Like our Father, our individual concern at this time is for everyone in the church.

Therefore, we "stand fast in one spirit, *with one mind striving together* for the faith of the gospel" (Philippians 1:27), "being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2).

The more we hold fast to the truth that has already been revealed to God's church, by obeying that truth, the more we will be speaking the same thing. "The same thing" *is* the truth that has been revealed to us.

If we continue to heed the apostles' instructions, we will *all* be growing in truth *and* unity.