

UNITY (Rom. 14:1)

Unity is an essential doctrine clearly taught in the Bible, and one which the Christian church has recognized throughout history. Theologians speak of the "*perspicuity*" of Scripture. This means the Bible is very *clear* and understandable on the theological issues that are essential and truly matter for eternal life and godliness. In other words, even if an unsaved person or baby Christian picks up the Bible, they will be able to understand the basic teachings such as who Christ is, how to have eternal life and how to live in victorious obedience over sin.

The Bible refers to "milk" and to "meat" in regards to Bible teachings (cf. Heb. 5:11-14). Solid food is reserved for those who are old enough in the Lord to chew on it and digest it. Hebrews speaks of the elementary doctrines of Christ, such as repentance, faith, baptism, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment (cf. Heb. 6:1-2).

A basic principle of Bible interpretation is that the unclear passages must be interpreted in light of the clear passages. For example, all Christians have clearly held to the full deity of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is fully God, coequal with the Father and the Holy Spirit. There are many passages which clearly teach that Jesus is God such as John 1:1; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; 1 Cor. 8:5-6; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:6-10; 1 Jn. 5:20. So then, when we read a passage that speaks of Christ as the "firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15), whatever that passage means it cannot mean that Jesus is not fully God! You see?

The many clear passages which teach that Jesus is God will not allow us to take an unclear passage to mean that Jesus is not God. The fact is that the terms "firstborn" does not mean "first-created" but rather means that Jesus is in the *position* of a firstborn son as heir of all things. So "*firstborn*" does not refer to Him being created at all, but instead refers to His being the heir of all things just like a firstborn son would be under Roman law.

The point of this example is to underscore that unity is a clear Bible doctrine and must be protected and maintained (Eph. 4:3). Unity is not to be rejected in favor of some "unclear" personal opinion. It is helpful to understand what the Bible teaches about personal opinions on doctrine or issues of personal preference. Romans 14:1 says that we must receive into the deepest level of fellowship a brother and not divide over "doubtful disputations." A doubtful issue is one over which godly, Bible believing Christians have been unable to come to agreement over the centuries.

These unclear issues are called "nonessentials". It is not essential that a person believe them in order to go to heaven. God has used Christians on both sides of these various issues. Godly Christians have held different views on issues like God's sovereignty, human responsibility, church government, sanctification, spiritual gifts and the end times. Believers must not divide over such nonessentials nor

force other believers to their way of thinking. Discussion is encouraged and debate is healthy if done in mutual respect and love for the Lord and each other.

The great essentials of the faith have been restated in the ancient creeds like the Apostle's Creed and the Athanasian Creed. In more recent times, The Fundamentals (a book seeking greater unity among brothers with various views), has reaffirmed the essentials and includes doctrines such as the verbal inspiration of the Bible, the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Christ, His virgin birth, sinless life, miracles, substitutionary death, bodily resurrection and literal return of Christ, and salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

God appeals to true Christians to recognize that division over nonessentials is Satan's strategy for blunting the evangelistic ministry of the Church. "A house divided cannot stand." Division has stopped many believers from getting fully involved in a church simply because they do not fully agree. **God does not expect His children to fully agree, only to be fully agreeable.** Division is sin and must be repented of. Don't allow your opinions on nonessential Christian issues to keep you from fully receiving into your fellowship others who disagree with you. Scriptures for study: Jn. 17:20-23; Acts 20:29-31; Rom. 14:1; 1 Cor. 1:10-13, 12:1-31; Eph. 4:1-16; Phil. 2:1-4.