

PRESCRIPTION FOR UNITY: ONE FAITH

The idea that a single faith is essential for Christian unity (Ephesians 4:5) should not be surprising to the student of the Bible. God's people have always been unique and are still called to be apart from the world today (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 18:4). In fact, the word church suggests a group of people called out for a special purpose.

The history of God's dealings with man shows that he often segregated his people. The origin of the Israelite people was with Abraham. The Bible shows that he left the Chaldean region of Ur at the time when God began to slowly and methodically reveal his will to him (Genesis 11:31; Genesis 12). The people of Ur were polytheists, that is, they worshiped many different gods. Abram was unique because he worshipped the one God, Jehovah.

As God brought his promises to Abraham to fruition we find the development of the Hebrew people. Small in number they settled in Egypt through the providence of God and lived in a relatively isolated region of Goshen (Genesis 47). This blessing of this location was that the Hebrews were protected from the panoply of Egyptian divinities that marked their culture. God was teaching them and protecting them from illicit worship. At their liberation from Egyptian oppression they traveled to Sinai where Jehovah Himself issued the laws that would govern their national and personal lives. The first commandment given was to "*have no other gods before me...*" (Exodus 20:3). In this way, the Creator demanded a single system of faith which was that he gave them at Sinai.

Any deviation from the God given pattern was met with grave consequences. Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire not authorized by God and were struck dead (Leviticus 10:1-2). David ordered the Ark of the Covenant moved by cart instead of on the shoulders of the priests (2 Samuel 6:3, c.f. Numbers 7:4-9 esp. verse 9). This, coupled with Uzzah's instinctive reach to steady the Ark of the Covenant, brought God's displeasure upon the Israelites and directly resulted in Uzzah's immediate death. God set the boundaries of their faith and expected his people to remain therein. Although the Jews would often stray from God's teachings in a variety of ways, they were generally known as people who believed in a single God, they were monotheists.

At the coming of the Christian era God brought a change among his people. No longer were they to be chosen by virtue of their physical birth as the Israelites were but God's people would be all of those re-born of water and the Spirit (John 3:3) no matter their heritage. This re-birth placed people in the church (Acts 2:47) which belonged unto Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23 - 30). This re-birth and accompanying placement by God into the church also brought forth new teaching or a new faith which differed significantly from that of the Old Testament (2 Corinthians 3:4-11). It is this new faith which governs us today. It includes the doctrine delivered by the Apostles and inspired men (Acts 2:42), a doctrine which must be obeyed (Romans 6:17).

The question that often interests us today involves the parameters or boundaries of that faith. Is it very broad consisting of simply a belief in Jesus? Or is it more narrow, involving the specifics of our lives and our worship. Put somewhat differently, are there any Biblical teachings that we can ignore or discount today? Are all churches that state belief in Jesus acceptable to God even if their worship and teaching varies from revealed Scripture? We will begin to answer these questions in our next article, however the history of God's dealing with man suggests we not overlook or change a single item which has been given to us.

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