

## *Church Unity with Bible Authority*

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### Abstract

This addresses issues that have hindered Christian unity, addresses divisiveness, teaches biblical Christian unity of purpose, and suggests applications. All is done holding to full accuracy and authority of Scripture. Generally, the study can be read skipping around among essays. Parts 2-7 are main component.

### Getting Started, Outlined, and Oriented

People argue about the Bible. This is as old as the Bible itself. In around 30 C.E.,<sup>1n</sup> the Lord Jesus Christ died and was resurrected, and He started the church of His followers inaugurated by His apostles. The New Testament is our record from the New Testament-era church, and its contents were considered binding. It was written in Greek without book titles and without divisions into chapters or verses; titles came later, chapter divisions came later yet, and verse divisions came in the 1500's. The church has always had problems, and after all the apostles died, harmful changes accelerated. By the 1500's, the two largest portions of the church were so far off their biblical basis that large-scale calls to return to Scripture could no longer be suppressed. In tacit admission of this disparity, church authorities initially opposed mass printing of the Scriptures for the common people, and/or their translation into languages understandable by the common people.<sup>2n</sup>

These were violent times. In 1408, when England was Catholic, the Oxford Council forbade Scripture editions in common language<sup>3</sup> after the 1300's John Wycliffe-John Purvey Bible in Middle English. Catholic authorities in Belgium captured English translator William Tyndale to have him martyred, which happened in 1536.<sup>4</sup> Francisco de Enzinas, despite effort to avoid offending anyone with his 1543 Spanish New Testament translation, escaped prison as his translation was suppressed.<sup>5</sup> The first full Bible Spanish translation from original languages was done by Cassiodoro/Casiodoro de Reyna/Reina in 1569 who was a refugee from the Spanish Inquisition,<sup>6</sup> and a revision was finished in 1602 by Cypriano/Cipriano de Valera, another refugee from the Inquisition.<sup>7</sup> In Orthodox territory, a 1600's Bible translation into modern Greek was done by Archimandrite Maximos Kallipolites; sponsor Kyrillos Loukaris wrote a preface that reports opponents who wanted to keep people from knowing the Scriptures.<sup>8</sup> Opposition to Scripture being effectively accessible to the masses was common because many church authorities feared the masses would see the mismatch between their policies and Scripture. Most of the church was over 1000 years off biblical course, and uncertainty over how best to go back to Scripture caused disagreement among those trying to do so. The church remained impeded from unity by a non-Scripture assumption that `unity depends on agreement.'

<sup>1</sup> I use C.E./B.C.E. instead of A.D./B.C. SOLELY because some people find the latter disenfranchising. Scripture never commands it, so I opt to avoid unnecessary offense.

**Notes with "n" are annotations; notes without are bibliographic. Bolds in Bible quotes are mine; otherwise, all quoted emphases are original unless noted otherwise. I often change Bible translations mid-quote; I use " | " for such places.**

<sup>2</sup> This was not a universal practice in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic groups. Catholic authorities in Italy and France permitted translation of Scripture into common languages there.\* Orthodox bishop Kyrillos Loukaris in the 1600's supported a Protestant proposal to translate the Bible into modern Greek.<sup>†</sup>

\* E. North, *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, page 304.

<sup>†</sup> Vapouris, *Translating the Scriptures into Modern Greek*, page 5.

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, *The English Bible From KJV To NIV*, page 20.

<sup>4</sup> John K. Hutcheson in J. Williams, Shaylor, *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man*, page 114.

<sup>5</sup> E. North, *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, page 304.

<sup>6</sup> González, *La Era de los Reformadores*, page 211.

<sup>7</sup> E. North, *The Book of a Thousand Tongues*, page 307.

<sup>8</sup> Vapouris, *Translating the Bible into Modern Greek*, pages 7-8.

<sup>x</sup> This study in its current draft can be downloaded and printed for free at < <http://dstele1976.tripod.com/unity2.html> >.

A non-Scripture assumption 'unity depends on agreement' had been common in the church since nearly its beginning. It caused the church in Europe to be largely divided from the church in Asia and Africa in the 400's. That non-Scripture assumption remained common during the 1500's Reformation in Europe and its aftermath. Because of that non-Scripture assumption, church groups that disagree have often continued to resist unity even through the 1900's and after.

As time passes, ever the more Christians have suspected that factional antagonism and aloofness are not right. In our effort to follow Scripture ever the better, let us revisit old assumptions on church unity, and study how church unity in Scripture is *unity of purpose*.

Biblical church unity is NOT uniform thought and NOT uniform congregation practice. Biblical church unity is NOT organizational union. Biblical church unity IS *unity of purpose*.

The purpose of this study was to put in written form an organized, systematic, and detailed presentation of Scripture's teachings about unity of Christians in the church. There is no intent for a thorough or persuasive treatise on any subject unrelated to unity of Christians in the church. The goal of this document was to study Scripture's teachings about this, examine the history of the church, and put these together to call for actions needed to grow an improved unity of Christians in the church.

The document outline is on the next page. The main component of this document is *Part 2* to *Part 7*. If readers choose to limit their reading to that area, they will see the core of this study.

I designed this document in hopes that a reader will normally be able to read this document piecemeal. This means that if all went according to plan, you can read one essay, then skip to another essay in the study, and not be lost. This leads to repetition of important material, but in educational practice, repetition of important material tends to reinforce it. I hope the effort to keep this document readable in piecemeal explains some of the unusual traits of this document.

*Part 1* can be skipped by many Christians and is more technical than the rest of this document. It shows that the Scriptures in their original languages in their original texts are the ultimate authority for divine truths. If the reader knows this, s/he can skip *Part 1*.

In *Part 2*, we discuss major causes of why the church became divided, and then start toward solutions. In *Part 3*, we see how the church needed all geographic regions of the church to get the Scriptures assembled together to have God's written Word. In *Part 4*, we clarify who is a Christian, so that we know who is included when we discuss biblical church unity. In *Part 5*, we discuss the Bible's teachings relevant to Christian non-divisiveness and unity. In *Part 6*, we discuss how those Bible teachings are connected to real church situations. In *Part 7*, we focus on action.

After this are two afterthoughts. The *Epilogue* discusses what the church could be like if biblical unity was enacted. The *Urging to Action* calls individual Christians to make their own efforts.

The *Personal Statement* shares some of my own personal experiences enlightening this study. The *Bibliography and More* includes printed volumes, Bible translations, and acknowledgements of other helpful resources. The *Permission to Circulate* explains freedoms to do so. The *Scripture Index of New Testament Books* lists pages where New Testament books or passages in them are discussed.

The main theses of this document are as follows. The church of Jesus Christ's followers was established to enact His teachings. Unfortunately, there are some carnal tendencies that entice all people to sin; those include desires toward prideful self-exaltation, toward strife, and toward factiousness. Church-affiliated persons' indulgences in these lusts have combined to cause divisions in the church. Furthermore, to disagree and divide are two different actions; this is a distinction many do not know to make, and this is a distinction that many refuse to make. The Bible teaches a distinction. Many people have viewed 'unity' as synonymous with 'agreement over religious details,' and/or with mergers of church groups. Again, Scripture teaches neither such thing. Scripture teaches something entirely different about church unity.

The Bible teaches that church unity is simply to be unity of purpose – to enact Jesus Christ's teachings. Christians need to learn these truths of Scripture, resist their own carnal divisive urges, and strive to stay rallied together around serving Jesus Christ by enacting His teachings.

Document Outline \* = essays of greater significance to this study's theses.

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Let us now proceed with the study. Then, let us apply the Bible's teachings on this subject. ■