

The Third Path to Christian Unity

- I. The Importance of Unity
 - a. Eph. 4:1-6
 - b. John 17:20-23
 - c. 1 Cor. 1:10
 - d. How do we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace?
- II. Key Thought: Historically and even in our day there have been two major methods of achieving religious unity that have been evident in human society, each with its advantages and disadvantages; but there is a third way that is the best way, the hardest way and the way demanded by God
- III. By Subjugation
 - a. Religious persecution
 - i. Many have justified using intimidation, persecution, or even force to achieve religious unity
 - b. Recant or die
 - i. Famous cases from history
 1. Catholic church told Galileo to renounce his heretical teachings or be killed
 2. Protestant priests forced Catholic Joan of Arc to recant or die
 - a. She recanted
 - b. But then unrecanted
 - c. And was killed
 3. Religious history is full of mass murders, targeted assassinations, tortures, extortion and threat
 4. All with the goal of bringing about religious unity
 - c. Today
 - i. Honor killings
 1. In several Muslim nations there is a death penalty for any Muslim to convert to Christianity, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia
 2. In many other nations every one looks the other way when the male relatives of the family kill a woman for breaking with religious traditions or even dating someone of another faith
 - ii. In the United States
 1. Six identified honor killings in the past two years
 2. Only six in the previous 18 years, on the rise
 3. In many of these cases, just customs or religious rules are being broken
 4. But last fall a Muslim teenager ran away from home because she was convinced she would be killed by her family because she had converted to Christianity

5. Those familiar with this practice say that often the mothers are involved begging the children to come home, knowing that they will be killed when they do.
 6. SOURCE: “Honor killings’ in USA raise concerns - USATODAY.com,” n.d., http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-11-29-honor-killings-in-the-US_N.htm.
 7. What is the goal of these horrendous practices, to preserve cultural and religious unity
- iii. Pros and Cons
1. Pros
 - a. Effective – Few under these circumstances would chance going against the religious norms
 - b. Takes religious and cultural values seriously
 2. Cons
 - a. Amounts to religious slavery
 - b. Devalues the individual life and the individual conscience
 - c. Assumes that the defended values are absolutely correct and unquestionable
 - d. Truth is determined by whoever has the most power
 - e. Fatally undermines the morality of the religion it seeks to preserve
 - f. UNBIBLICAL
– John 18:36
- d. Suppose you and I disagree religiously
- i. But we don’t want to kill each other!
 - ii. Is there another path to Christian unity?

IV. By Subtraction

- a. Suppose you and I disagree religiously
 - i. The Bible says one thing
 - ii. My beliefs include things that are in the Bible and things that are not
 - iii. Your beliefs include things that are in the Bible and things that are not
 - iv. Where our beliefs overlap, we are in agreement and have unity
 - v. Where our beliefs do not overlap we are divided and lack religious unity
 - vi. The second path to religious unity says, “Let’s agree to disagree on those areas where our beliefs are different, as long as we can agree on the essential elements of the Christian faith
 - vii. Sometimes called “Unity in Diversity”
- b. Pros and Cons
 - i. Pros
 1. Unity is relatively easy to achieve

2. No killing or involuntary submission
- ii. Cons
 1. Treats truth as less important than human agreement
 2. Parts of Scripture are set aside and forgotten
 3. The definition of “essential truth” is totally arbitrary
 - a. Nearly everybody agrees that there should be some core Christian beliefs that can’t be set aside just to maintain Christian unity
 - b. Who decides what is the core truth that can’t be negotiated
 - i. And what can be set aside for the goal of religious unity?
 - ii. You, me? Some human religious governing body?
 - c. Attempts to distinguish between “gospel” and “doctrine”
 4. Fatally undermines the morality of the unity it seeks to preserve
 5. “The faith” gets smaller and smaller the more unity is pursued
 - a. There is apparently no end to how much essential truth can shrink to accommodate human opinion
 - b. CHARTS of “Essential Truth” shrinking
 6. The Biggest Negative of All - UNBIBLICAL
 - a. What about 2 John 9-11?
 - i. If we don’t stay in the teaching of Christ we don’t have God
 - ii. If we support and encourage those who are teaching and practicing things outside the boundaries of Christ’s teaching
 - iii. We share in their guilt
- c. What can we do?
 - i. Are the only choices forcing others to agree with us or compromising the truth?
 - ii. There must be another way
 - iii. There is, it is the third way to Christian Unity

V. By Submission

- a. Three aspects of submission
 - i. Submission to God’s word –
 1. 1 Cor. 1:10
 2. Phil 2:1-2;
 3. 2 Th 2:15,3:14
 - ii. Submission to the correction of others
 1. Acts 18:24-26
 2. Gal. 2:11-14 - Paul corrects Peter
 - iii. Submission to the conscience of others

1. 1 Cor. 8:8-13

b. Pros

- i. The truth is valued above human agreement
- ii. No killing or coercion
- iii. The more people we follow this path with the more we understand Gods' will
 1. You and I get our differences in understanding worked out and we find we understand each other and Gods' will much better as a result
 - a. We have not compromised the truth
 - b. We have not compromised our conscience or our brother's conscience
 2. But then another person shows up
 - a. Now what are we going to do?
 - b. Start all over again with them!
 - c. But the result is
 - i. We end up understanding each other and God's will much better as a result
 - ii. And the truth and conscience have not been violated
 3. CONTRAST with Path of Subtraction
- iv. BIBLICAL – b/c of all the scriptures we have studied

c. Cons

- i. Requires passionate love for God and His word
- ii. Requires strong desire for Christian unity
- iii. Requires submission
- iv. Requires hard work
- v. Requires time
- vi. It only works when it is tried!

VI. Conclusion

a. Application

- i. Using the three ways as a tool for evangelism
 1. When your friend mentions one of the catchphrases of the Second Path
 2. Ask "Have you heard of the Third Path to Christian Unity?"
 3. Talk about the three paths
 - a. Draw the circles and demonstrate the problem of shrinking the faith and abandoning truth to "get along"
 - b. Demonstrate the third way using the circles
 4. Tell your friend "I want to have true Christian unity with you by following the third path. Would you agree to follow this path with me?"
 5. If your friend agrees to the third Path
 6. Then studying the Bible with you is the best, most natural way of pursuing religious unity

- b. Review the three paths
 - i. Subjugation – The focus is on not compromising the truth, but individual consciences are compromised and therefore the truth is also compromised
 - ii. Subtraction – The focus is on individual conscience, but the truth is compromised and those with a heart for the truth have their consciences compromised
 - iii. Submission –
 - iv. Which way do you hear promoted in your family, congregation, neighborhood, and society?
 - v. Which will you promote and act upon?
 - vi. What steps can you take this week to promote true Christian unity in your personal relationships?
- c. Invitation