

The Old Paths

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“No Need For ‘Common Ground’ (#2)”

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If by this time, you have not heard about “Common Ground,” then you must not subscribe to the newspaper, watch TV, nor listen to the radio. It has been interesting to note the amount media coverage this place has received in the last week. In the last issue of *The Old Paths*, we reviewed the article as was found in the 5/26/02 edition of *The Messenger-Inquirer* (p. 1C). I want to look back to that one more time and deal with one area of false doctrine which, not only permeates those involved with “Common Ground,” but is quite prominent in the world today.

In that article, Mr. Kevin Hall, said, “We’re majoring in what binds us together instead of what divides us.” Later in the article, he was quoted as saying, “The things we will do together will not have to do with doctrine.” Perhaps we have heard others connected with this project saying similar things. The words of Mr. Hall raised “red flags” with me, for I believe what Mr. Hall said speaks to a larger problem we face in this world.

“Unity-In-Doctrinal Diversity”

What Mr. Hall, and the rest of this group are appealing for is that people ignore doctrinal differences, and just try to “get along” in spite of the different and conflicting doctrines they are teaching in their various churches. This is hypocritical!

Please understand, we need to deal honestly with reality, and not try to sweep our differences under

the rug, pretending like they do not exist. Unfortunately, merely ignoring doctrinal differences happens all too often. For example, I know of a couple who married and though they were of different religions, said, “We worship the same God.” How is it possible for people to worship the same God acceptably when each one would “worship God” in completely different ways? Did God tell us just to worship Him, or did He tell us specifics as to “how” He wishes to be worshipped?

I know God expected to be worshipped in a certain way in the days of Genesis, for God had respect for one offering, and not another (Gen. 4:1-11). In fact, He said Abel’s sacrifice was “*more excellent*” than Cain’s. (Heb. 11:4). He said one was done “*by faith*,” and the other was not. Continuing on in the Bible, we cannot help but be impressed that God wanted worship to be done in a certain way. The last half of Exodus describes in minute detail how they were to build the tabernacle, the furniture, how they were to make the spices, etc. God even said concerning the altar they would make, “*An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it.*” (Ex. 20:24-25). Does this sound like God in the Old Testament accepted just anything men wished to “throw up” to Him? In

the New Testament, we see no change. We are expected to worship God “*in spirit and in truth*” (Jn. 4:24; parallel: Josh. 24:14). Then, we find specific things expected in worship to God today: prayer, singing, giving, partaking of the Lord’s Supper, and preaching (Acts 2:42, 20:7; Eph. 5:19; I Cor. 16:1-2).

What right then do we have to say, “You do what you want to, I’ll do what I want to, and we’ll all get along”? While considering these things, please read Mr. Hall’s statements again. After doing that, consider this question.....

Why Does “Unity” Require Throwing Doctrine Out The Door?

I have always wondered why it is that when most men call for “unity” with each other, they’ll say words like Mr. Hall did: “We’re majoring on what binds us together instead of what divides us.” Why do people say things like this when the Bible says just the opposite?

Amos asked, “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed?*” (Amos 3:3). I imagine the so-called unity these people are crying for (i.e., “union”) will last until the first teenager wishes to visit one of the representative churches in town. What then? Where will this person go? Will the Baptist “youth minister” encourage someone to go to the Methodist church, or Catholic church (or vice versa)? Not likely!

The inspired apostle Paul wrote much about unity, and his words were far different from those promoting “Common Ground.” Paul said: “*Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be **likeminded one toward another** according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with **one mind and one mouth** glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (Rom. 15:5-6). To the divided Corinthian brethren, he wrote, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus*

“Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk

Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (I Cor. 1:10). In his second letter to these brethren, he said, *"Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you"* (II Cor. 13:11). He wrote to the Philippians, and said: *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; ... Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind"* (Phil. 1:27; 2:2). Peter wrote to the scattered Christians, and reminded them, *"Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous"* (I Pet. 3:8).

How can people today be of "one mind," strive "together" for a goal, be of "one accord," and "one spirit," have "no divisions," and speak with "one mouth"? Some say this cannot be done, or insist that it only happens when we throw the Bible out the window, and pretend like there are no differences. Paul and Peter say we can be united in the same gospel, and in fact, demand it! In religion, many say, "In order to have unity, throw the Bible away and pretend like there are no differences between us." Yet, in no other relationship in life would men suggest such a thing. In order for lawyers to practice law, they must follow the same law book. If a contractor was to make an addition full of identical houses, would he not follow the same plans on each house? Why then in spiritual matters, would we throw away the

rules/pattern when striving for unity? How much sense does this make? In fact, it is contradictory to the Scriptures.

True Bible Unity

The only way we will have true Bible unity is when we agree to go by the same standard — the Bible! These people associated with "Common Ground" will never have anything more than "union" (and that very loosely) in their present condition. If we wish for unity, the answer is NOT to throw the Bible out, or throw our convictions out the window. The way to achieve true religious unity is by living by the Standard, the Bible, in all things and standing up for our convictions! We will earn more respect from God and our fellow man for having principles, and standing for them, than for being "wishy-washy" on issues.

Let us have the attitude of Peter and John, who, when threatened for preaching Christ said, *"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."* (Acts 4:20). Let us have the conviction of all the apostles who told the Sanhedrin, *"We ought to obey God rather than men"* (Acts 5:29). Let us have the conviction of Paul, who did not apologize, nor waver in standing for the truth, whether he were in the presence of Jews, Romans, Greeks, kings, priests, paupers, slaves, or anyone else!

Conclusion

The Bible contains within it the prescription for true Bible unity; but true Bible unity is absent in the plans for "Common Ground" because those people have based their efforts on something besides the Bible ground. Brethren, let our eyes be opened to this truth. As was said in the first article, I am not trying to impugn motives. I am sure they are as sincere and as honest as they can be in their efforts to have a "clean" and "safe" place for teenagers to visit. Yet, they are "sincerely" wrong and "honestly" mistaken if they think that throwing the Bible away will be conducive to anything but division and chaos.

Based on these two articles written concerning the "Common Ground" endeavor, I hope we can see the Scriptural problems associated with it. Let us not fall into the trap which looks upon things which are "different" or "exciting" as things we need to try, just for the sake of being "different." In truth, such efforts do nothing but bring about spiritual problems and discord among brethren. *"What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"* (Micah 6:8) This attitude is needed today, and the only way we can *"do justly ... love mercy, and ... walk humbly"* is to go to the Bible and unite upon it's precepts alone.

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