

NASU Questions and Answers

“Q & A’s” First Edition

The following questions have been collected from some of the correspondence we have received since the release of the NASU document to the brotherhood in North America in December 2001. Many of the questions we received were similar, so we trust that the questions as worded below and the corresponding answers adequately address the concerns and questions that have been sent in. Should further clarification be required, brethren are encouraged to write in and ask further questions.

Please note that we have received several batches of correspondence, some of which are addressed in this issue, while others are under consideration for subsequent Q & A editions.

Q 1. Is the NASU causing dis-unity by promoting unity?

A 1. Certainly, nothing could be further from the intent. The NASU initiative was started in recognition of the fact that Christadelphians in North America are already divided into factions. As with past unity initiatives, it was felt by a number of brethren that this ought not be the case, and that there is strong scriptural support for the principle of a single united Body.

The intent of the NASU proposal is to be as inclusive as possible where there is understanding and agreement on scriptural principles and it is aimed at eliminating and not increasing factions within the Christadelphian community. The fear that attempts at unity will cause further factions has been raised as an argument against all previous efforts. It is incumbent on all brethren to act in good conscience and take personal responsibility for their own positions with regards to this proposal. Objective assessment of any proposal should be based on its merits and not on fear.

Q 2. What is the NASU Steering Committee’s plan for fellowship implementation issues such as dealing with ecclesias which feel they cannot participate at this time?

A 2. As noted in the last paragraph of the fellowship section of the NASU document, it is the intent to address details of fellowship implementation at a later date. Further, the letter that accompanied the NASU proposal recognizes the value of consulting the brotherhood broadly for its advice and assistance in planning future steps.

Q 3. How does the NASU proposal plan to deal with balancing various fellowship issues like ensuring consistency in fellowship practices versus ecclesial autonomy issues, etc.?

A 3. As with the question above, the details of implementation are yet to be worked out and will require the wisdom and input of the broader community. Although some of these issues seem very difficult and daunting, similar situations have been resolved elsewhere in the world. More importantly, nothing is impossible for God and we are confident that these issues can also be resolved with His guidance.

Q 4. Why has BASF clause 24 been repeated on page 5 under the heading Resurrectional Responsibility, when it already occurs in the statement of faith section of the document?

A 4. The only material difference between the BUSF and the BASF is in this clause, and the only difference in BASF # 24 and BUSF #25 is the amendment (in parentheses). It was important to have the exact wording presented to the reader. The specific wording is commented upon in the bullets which follow, and it was important that the wording be presented in the context of the full clause.

Q 5. In the Resurrectional Responsibility section, why is the third bullet needed when the first bullet addresses the stated reason for the amendment?

A 5. BASF clause 24 exists and its amendment must be addressed. Its inclusion and bullet 3 remind all readers that the amendment speaks of two factors, knowledge and calling, and not just the single factor of knowledge. Bullet 3 further acknowledges that the identification of who is called is not for man to determine, but God. The language "those ... whom His justice demands" identifies the selection of those raised for condemnation on these two bases as being subject to the demands of God's justice.

- Q 6. Also in bullet three, what is the rationale for making the positive assertion that God "will raise to condemnation those rebels and unbelievers whom His justice demands" [emphasis added].
- A 6. When God's justice demands that something happen, it is certain to happen. The word "may", would not be appropriate in this circumstance.
- Q 7. There has been speculation among both Amended and Unamended brethren that God may raise wicked men such as Hitler for judgment. How does the NASU deal with this?
- A 7. In the NASU this matter is left open by the statement in the first bullet on page 5 which says, "God's hands are not tied in any way from raising for condemnation any rebels and unbelievers He deems to be so deserving, regardless of whether they are baptized or unbaptized." This issue has not been a point of difference between the two communities.
- Q 8. Does the NASU provide an effective defense against "clean flesh" thinking?
- A 8. Some have raised this and similar questions because the NASU does not use certain phrases or words that are associated with this and related controversies. The approach has been to avoid use of language that has been embroiled in past controversy. Such terms or phrases have different connotations to different readers who have varying levels of familiarity with their history. Simple language was used to express teaching that can be directly supported from Scripture. Those involved in NASU discussions have gone to great lengths to thoroughly treat the subjects of Adamic Condemnation (which deals with the nature of man) and The Lord's Involvement in His Own Sacrifice (which deals with the nature of Christ) in such a way that one could not embrace both NASU and the clean-flesh error. Some have suggested that the NASU will provide an excellent teaching tool on the Atonement and a bulwark against clean-flesh thinking in North America.
- Q 9. It is sometimes asserted by some individuals that "Amended brethren believe X", and "Unamended brethren believe Y", and that there can be no common expression of understanding between the two communities. The NASU suggests otherwise. How is one to know which of these claims is accurate?
- A 9. The NASU resulted from a process of broad input. Amended and Unamended brethren met using the Bible to discuss the subjects that have historically been associated with the division. Position taking, short-hand phrases and jargon were put aside. The intent was to discover first hand what each other believed, to see if there was a sufficient basis to move toward unity. Although many pioneer works are well known, understood and respected in both communities, their writings were not used as complete or current expressions by the brethren now involved in face-to-face discussion of issues related to unity. It was felt that that the only accurate way to determine a common expression of understanding was through direct Bible study and discussion between brethren.

In general, brethren who make claims about "what the Amended believe" and/or "what the Unamended believe" do so based on "positions" they have heard or read about - from sources not directly or currently involved. The difficulty with this is that brethren write as individuals, and within specific contexts. Further, this approach lacks the opportunity of dialogue to clarify the writer's full intent and context. It is also true that brethren really represent only themselves when they write, and may or may not represent others as accurately or comprehensively as they can themselves.

The only reliable documents that can claim to represent whole communities' "positions" are the respective statements of faith – both of which are included in the NASU document. Some brethren claim that it is the positions that exist beyond the written text of the statements that are the real areas of difference. These supposed areas of difference became the subject headings of the NASU document and were discussed face to face amongst many brethren in the fashion noted above.

One has to consider which is more likely to represent a true understanding of the two communities:

- a) The product of several years of Bible study and discussion involving over a thousand Amended and Unamended brethren from a wide variety of ecclesias in different areas who have reviewed and contributed to the NASU; or,
- b) Selected quotations from diverse writings and contexts, without the benefit of dialogue to clarify the full context and the writers' intent.