

NEWSLETTER

PROGRESS TOWARD UNITY

Through God's grace, there is very good progress to report on the Unity effort.

Over the last several months, a number of meetings have taken place among the approximately 40 ecclesias that have been directly involved in the NASU process. The content of the meetings has ranged from discussing the subject of Resurrectional Responsibility in more detail to further discussing, clarifying and summarizing the areas of doctrine set out in the NASU document.

Two joint meetings were held with the mid-Atlantic ecclesias on March 8 and April 26.

Then, on June 7, a meeting was held with delegates from the mid-West ecclesias who had previously completed discussions on the NASU doctrinal statements. On June 12, a meeting was held with delegates from the participating Ontario ecclesias. These meetings also updated these regions as to the progress of the Unity initiative. The progress with these groups is encouraging as to ultimate success, since these ecclesias are fairly representative of the broad spectrum of perspectives and emphases in both communities in the entire continent.

PREPARATORY MEETINGS

An interesting development in the mid-Atlantic meetings was the formulation of questions and answers exchanged by the two groups. Prior to the meeting on April 26, preparatory meetings were held by the groups, meeting separately. These separate meetings resulted in useful discussion, as questions were refined and misconceptions were cleared up, even before meeting with the other side. When the two groups got together, discussion was easier and more profitable.

MUTUAL ASSURANCE

A key to success in all meetings was the respectful spirit of Christ that prevailed. These meetings have generated considerable mutual assurance, as indicated by the **Mutual Assurances Related to the NASU Unity Document** included later in this newsletter. Fears and misconceptions have been dispelled and a clarification of views achieved, revealing that the two groups were not far apart, but rather it was a matter of different emphasis. Some delegates have expressed great relief and thankfulness that such progress had been achieved and that the brethren on the "other side" had been so helpful and respectful. Brethren were grateful and enthusiastic about the progress enjoyed with God's blessing.

And beyond these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

NAS Col. 3:14

A SUMMARY OF ASSURANCES

The NASU Committee, summarizing the essentials of questions and answers and clarification statements,

has prepared a synopsis of the discussions in the three regions. This does not change the NASU; it merely comments on it. It should be of help to ecclesial delegates when reporting the findings of the various meetings to Arranging Brethren and/or ecclesias.

The full text of the Assurances is given on the following two pages.

THE PATH TO UNITY

There are several keys to achieving unity:

1. **Prayer:** ("Except the Lord build the house they labour in vain.")
2. **The Spirit of Christ:** We must act towards each other in love, integrity and respect.
3. **Patience:** We have been apart for over 100 years. We must be prepared to take time to reconcile with each other, listening and discussing, allowing for the body to heal.

MUTUAL ASSURANCES RELATED TO THE NASU UNITY DOCUMENT

This synopsis is derived from joint discussions as well as input from numerous sources throughout both the Amended and Unamended communities, and indicates acceptance of the following points of agreement and related emphasis.

Discussion Notes on *Resurrectional Responsibility*

To address questions concerning the intent of the third bullet point in the Resurrectional Responsibility statement subsequent to distribution of the NASU document dated November 2001, the NASU steering committee brethren prepared the following three discussion points:

General Principle

1. Rejection of God's knowledge and calling are grounds of condemnation and punishment by God. The following are a few of the scriptural references that reveal this principle: *Prov. 1:20-33; Luke 10:13-16, 12:47,48; John 3:19, 9:39-41, 15:22; Acts 17:30,31; James 4:17.*

Application Of Principle To Resurrectional Judgement

2. Divine wisdom and justice alone will determine who should be raised from the dead to be condemned and punished on these grounds. It is certain that His will is righteous and shall be done.
3. No human can identify or quantify individuals in this category with certainty.

Further Points of Agreement and Acceptance

- A. It is mutually agreed that the Scriptures give significant emphasis to the principle in point 1 above, and that knowledge and a call to conscience (1 Pet. 3:21) are necessary elements in a valid covenant (baptism in this dispensation).
- B. Many Unamended brethren believe that the significant Scriptural emphasis concerning resurrection and judgment of the saints links it to the covenant we enter with God through baptism into our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 6:3-5), as reflected in the many parables concerning faithful and unfaithful servants in the household (Matt. 18:23-35, 24:42-51, 25:14-46; Luke 12:36-48, 19:12-26). Further, they teach that entering into covenant relationship through knowledgeable baptism makes certain one's resurrection and judgment, while acknowledging God's sovereign right to raise others outside covenant for punishment on the grounds of point 1 above, trusting in His divine wisdom and righteousness to determine the appropriateness of this in individual cases.
- C. Amended brethren respect and largely share this emphasis, and observe that Scripture focuses primarily on the faithful saints whom Christ will approve at his appearing (1 Cor. 15:51-52; Rom. 14:8-13; Psa. 50:3-6; 2 Tim 4:8), because our concern with those in Gentile darkness is to lead them into the light: "them that are without, God judgeth." (1 Cor. 5:12-13).
- D. It is mutually agreed that the commitment we make to be God's servants, when we enter covenant relationship through baptism, heightens our responsibility to Him. Likewise, the principle "to whom much is given much is required" applies especially to God's servants who have been reconciled, sanctified and made holy in Christ Jesus, and are thus responsible to "walk in newness of life", to be spiritually minded and to be "conformed to the image of his Son".
- E. Amended brethren emphasize knowledge of God's revealed will and calling to submit to it as a common basis of resurrectional judgment for those in covenant relationship and those without whom God requires to give account for their refusal of His gracious invitation to eternal life.
- F. It is acknowledged that historically, some brethren held the view that *enlightened rejectors* would not appear alongside the saints, who are judged concerning their service, but would likely be judged at a different time and place, such as at the end of the millennium. It is agreed to respect different views on the time and place of judgment for those outside covenant.
- G. The assertion of the definite view that "God can raise those outside covenant, but He won't" is perceived to be a very slight shade away from, or even a cloak

for the more extreme position (He can't). It is agreed that this view is inconsistent with the principles stated in the three numbered points above and with God's sovereign right to exercise His divine will according to His righteousness, wisdom and mercy. It was agreed the NASU statement precludes this posture.

H. The Scriptures teach that God considers all humanity to be responsible to him, whether or not they are in covenant relationship to him. It is a serious error to condone the belief that God overlooks sin prior to baptism. People who wilfully reject God are repellent to Him, and liable to His judgments. Individuals cannot, by their action or inaction regarding baptism, exempt themselves from responsibility to God in this life or in the age to come. It is expected that brethren will not press the issue and insist that God "must" raise particular individuals to judgment because they are felt to have sufficient knowledge of the Truth. We all recognize God's sovereignty and place our trust in His wisdom, justice and mercy to determine the appropriate handling of such individuals. We feel the NASU statement that "none can determine who has been called according to knowledge to submit to His will" appropriately addresses this matter and we are reluctant to speculate as to the identity or quantity of those who meet the stated criteria for condemnation, content that God will raise and punish those "whom His justice demands."

- I. Baptism is the pivotal step in the process of our salvation. Salvation begins when we gain awareness of God and His plan, understand it, feel its call of conscience, repent, seek forgiveness, and submit to baptism into the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. By the grace of God we are cleansed and reconciled to Him through this faithful act, being greatly privileged by adoption into His family. Our names are written in the Book of Life, identifying us as eligible for the gift of life eternal - but our names can be blotted out again if we are judged unfaithful. In this sense, condemnation associated with the race headed by Adam is lifted when we are adopted as children of God with Jesus Christ as our head (Rom. 5:12-21, 8:1,2; Rev. 3:5). In Romans 8 (as also in Rom. 6) we find two other senses in which condemnation is relieved and the spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees us from the wages of sin: A) After our repentance and our faithful submission to baptism, we can be confident that God works in our lives to conform us to the image of His son provided we endeavour earnestly to walk according to the spirit and not the flesh. (It is God who *justifies*, or *makes righteous*.) B) When we fall under condemnation anew for our own transgressions, by God's grace, forgiveness is available to us if we seek it in sincere repentance.
- J. All agree that the overall emphasis of Scripture concerning resurrection is the positive hope of resurrection to life eternal for faithful believers and that our teaching emphasis on resurrection should reflect this.

Guiding Principles Used by the NASU Committee ([Link to webpage](#))

Early in the NASU process, the Committee first agreed on principles they thought essential to a Scriptural solution to healing the division. Here they are:

1. Manifest the spirit of Christ in content and manner of discussion.
2. Seek Bible Truth as a single team.
3. Share information openly within the joint group and ecclesial community.
4. Encourage prayer for unity.
5. Truth and important principles are not to be compromised.
6. Jargon is to be avoided, using clear language and Scriptural wording.
7. Partisan debate and competitive behaviour are not permitted.

HOW DOES “ECCLESIAL AUTONOMY” AFFECT FELLOWSHIP?

A number of brothers and sisters have expressed themselves to the Steering Committee regarding how a NASU-based agreement between the two fellowships would be implemented. It is evident that the principle of “ecclesial autonomy” is very important in our community.

The only decision-making body in the Christadelphian community is the ecclesia. It is, therefore, individual ecclesias that determine their relationships with each other, how to conduct their own affairs and how to respond to community-wide initiatives. Each ecclesia has the scriptural responsibility to make its own decisions.

The booklet “The Ecclesial Guide” (initially titled “A Guide to the Formation and Conduct of Christadelphian Ecclesias”) was written in 1883 and has been a foundation of ecclesial interaction in the Christadelphian community ever since. This guide, which predates the division, is widely used in both Amended and Unamended communities, although some in each community employ it more formally than do others. Even ecclesias that do not explicitly consult the Ecclesial Guide apply its principles in their decision-making.

In our current unity context, the practicalities of implementing an agreement could be daunting if it were attempted to define conduct in every conceivable circumstance. Such an attempt would require some decision-making mechanism above the ecclesia, and therefore likely be rejected by ecclesias.

Perhaps a more practical approach would be to apply the pertinent principles stated in the Ecclesial Guide* (in particular sections 41 and 42). Individual ecclesias would determine whether or not they support a statement of agreement. Ecclesias would deal with individual cases within their ecclesia.

A structure of “ecclesial autonomy” is based on a solid foundation that was laid out in the “Ecclesial Guide” in the early days of the Christadelphian community. It has served us well and with God’s blessing may continue to serve us well.

* Note: The full text of the Ecclesial Guide is available on the NASU web site: www.nasu.ca. The booklet is available in many ecclesial libraries.

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