

Can There be Unity in the Body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 1:10 "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Many years ago, after a rousing sermon on church unity, I'll never forget the little girl who approached me after the service. She said, "Mister Pastor, why are there so many abominations?" I chuckled at her mispronunciation of "denomination," but thought to myself, perhaps her term is the more appropriate one to describe the division that sometimes exists between so many churches.

In the body of Christ, the various denominations exist largely due to different opinions about certain doctrines, organizational government, the style of worship, or perhaps passed-down traditions. But what is not commonly understood, is that most Christian churches have far more in common than they have in disagreement with each other. Researchers indicate that the

majority of protestant/evangelical congregations in the U.S. share at least 90% of the same beliefs. And more importantly, there is little disagreement over the most basic elements of Christianity — such as Jesus' life and teachings, including His deity, death and resurrection.

The Apostle Paul, in his first letter to the church at Corinth, made it clear that division and disharmony in the body of Christ was not acceptable. In fact, he expressed an expectation of the church that sounds nearly unbelievable in today's standards: "that you all speak the same thing... that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment."

Is it really possible for the body of Christ to attain such high ideals of unity? In practical terms, would it be possible for the Christian community to come into such harmony that we all "speak the same thing?" Such a possibility exists, only if Christians and churches can focus on the common ground of what makes us all Christians and followers of Christ.

More than any other factor, the common bond upon which every Christian

church is founded is "Jesus Christ." He is the cornerstone upon which every believer bases his trust in eternal things. Above all other things, even above our interpretations and eloquent commentaries, "Jesus" needs to be the objective of preaching and teaching in the church. He is the object of our worship, the purpose of our service, the meaning of our very existence. And it's at the foot of the cross, where every humble believer finds that same common, blood-soaked ground which brings us together in unity as brothers and sisters in the family of God. Jesus said it Himself, that His suffering on the cross was a magnet to the lost — and from that great event He will gather to himself a collected body of followers. *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself" (John 12:32).*

And so, unity between the churches is indeed possible "if" Jesus is fully committed to be our common denominator. Jesus must be the focal point — more than our variety of opinions and more than our celebrated traditions. We need to lift Him up above all things and speak the language that Jesus spoke — the language of God's love.

Speak lovingly and kindly of those

who attend other churches —they are your family too. Cease striving, or competing against Christians of other congregations. Love, forgive, trust and uplift one another in the vast reservoir of God love.

Genuine love for our other brothers and sisters brings an image of “credibility” to the church. Jesus said that the world would identify His followers by love for each other. He indicated that the Gospel message would influence the whole world, from the evidence of our love for our brethren. Perhaps this is what the world is waiting for — to see a body of Christians who sincerely care about each other, who are not embroiled in conflict or competition. Then perhaps they will more likely believe that we really do represent Jesus, and might be inclined to trust the Gospel message we preach. Jesus said, *“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:34-35).

Both in the singular congregation and in the overall body of Christ, God’s blessing resides upon love and unity.

The psalmist declared that unity is associated with His anointing — a symbolic application of oil, representing His Holy Spirit. *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments”* (Psa. 133:1-2).

If there was ever a time that the church needs God’s anointing, it is today. And if we hope to embrace that anointed blessing, let each of us strive to make our contribution to the unity of the body of Christ.

VL-606

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