

#29 “Biblical Unity”

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Isn't it strange that when the world claims to desire unity that its emphasis is rapidly becoming diversity? This is because the world cannot solve the problem of disunity, it cannot stop wars, and it cannot bring peace. Only Christ can change a heart and cause a person to esteem others more highly than himself. Only Christ is the answer. Obviously then, the world's approach of tolerance will not work. Tolerance merely accepts the reality that differences, conflicts, disagreements, and contradictions are here to stay. It thus tells people that there is no right or wrong position, belief, or behavior, but that all people are just different. When tolerance becomes the rule, true unity becomes impossible because truth is cast aside. Tolerance stops pursuing truth, opting in exchange for the acceptance of all ideas and practices. The bitter irony of the tolerance and diversity agenda is that it cannot tolerate or embrace as equally valid those who hold to universal truth or who believe in an exclusively right religion. Therein it is self-defeating.

Tolerance emphasizes differences, while the Bible emphasizes unity. Tolerance says that it accepts all things and people, but it is unable to truly love others. It merely tolerates them. Christianity, on the other hand, says that, though others might be different and even wrong about something, they can still be loved. Tolerance doesn't love others enough to tell them that they are wrong, unless of course they are being "intolerant." The bottom line is that if tolerance is practiced in the church, then truth will be minimized, love will be exchanged for acceptance, and true Biblical unity will be forfeited.

John 17:21-23 says,

“That they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.”

This passage leaves no doubt that true unity comes by people being in Christ as they repent of their sin and put their faith in Him. Christ prays for His disciples and for all who would come after them (the church) that they would be unified. This unity can only happen if we are grafted into Christ by faith. Unity thus requires an adherence to truth, which is personified by Christ Himself, Who is the truth (John 14:6). True unity is that we be one as Jesus and the Father are one. Jesus and the Father are literally one God, believing the same things, thinking the same things, doing the same things, and so on. There is nothing that is more indicative of oneness than the example of Jesus and the Father. Jesus said that those who have seen Him have seen the Father (John 14:9). True unity then, as Jesus prays, is that we join Their unity, being in Them. It is Jesus in us, the

Father in Jesus, and, by implication, us in the Father and in Jesus. We are made part of Christ's body, spiritually speaking. True unity requires that we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord and let Him indwell us. So only through Jesus, Who is the Truth, can unity ever be possible.

If we as God's people want to be unified, we must become more and more like Christ. We do this as we apply His Word and understand it. John 17:17, just a few verses earlier, is a lead-in to Christ's prayer for unity. He gives us, in essence, the key to pursuing this unity among brothers and sisters in Christ. He prays to the Father, "Sanctify them in the word; Your word is truth." True unity will increase as we are conformed to the Word of God in belief and obedience. It is through right understanding of the Scripture that true unity takes place.

Some Christians erroneously encourage a settling for a plurality of viewpoints in the church. Not being conformed to the truth, the church of plurality becomes a church of tolerance. We just agree to disagree. This is the world coming into the church. The fact is that somebody is right and somebody is wrong. Some denominations are right on some things, and others are right on others. The very meaning of the word "denomination" implies inherent division and disagreement. The problem with this is that Christ's prayer is not speaking of merely the invisible unity that the professing body of Christ should possess but a visible unity that the world can see, perceive, and through which it can be impacted. The goal of Christ's prayer is that the world would know and believe that the Father sent the Son and that the Son loved His people. If the church is not unified visibly, then the progress of the gospel is obstructed. The only way that true visible unity will happen is if true invisible unity occurs first. This can only happen, not if we learn to just accept different traditions as all valid and equal versions, but if we pursue the truth according to the infallible Word of God.

This is not mere rhetoric or wishful thinking. Christ prayed for it, and we should to. The fact of the matter is that the Spirit's job is to lead believers into all truth, not just some truth or the truth that pertains merely to the basics of Christian belief (John 16:13). His purpose and mission is to draw us into Christ and God according to the word of the Father. If we are to be one as God and Christ are one, the Spirit must apply the Word of God to our hearts. We must yield ourselves humbly to finding out what Scripture says. Theology books may say one thing, seminaries and their doctrinal systems another, and denominational leaders yet another, but the Bible says the truth. If true unity is ever to be manifested on earth, it will only be in the church of Jesus Christ and only as it conforms to the truth of God's Word. The world's attempts at unity are feeble and false at best. Only Christ can bring true, full, and lasting unity. If the church wants to be a picture of visible unity, it will be by faith in Christ as we grow in Him according to the truth of the Bible (Ephesians 4:11-13). Perfected unity won't happen until we are glorified, but in the meantime, let us seek Biblical unity by faith in Christ by pursuing a growing understanding of the Bible and by humbly yielding to the Spirit within us as He guides us into all truth.