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The Importance of Unity

How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
Psalm 133:1

August 2010 by Cal Fullerton

I firmly believe that God grieves over the divisions among those who have chosen to make Jesus Christ their Lord. That belief is based on the fact that he sometimes allows me to feel a little of his grief. God is calling us all to play our unique role in bringing about unity in the body of Christ.

Currently, an increase of harmony is needed on many levels:

- Within marriages
- Within fellowship groups
- Within local churches
- Between local churches
- Between ethnic groups (Martin Luther King's specialty)
- Between rich and poor (Mother Teresa's specialty)
- Between denominations and movements

This article focuses on the importance of dissolving divisions between denominations and movements. As we learn how to increase cooperation between denominations, we'll automatically make progress on the smaller end of the scale as well. After all, big barriers come down one relationship at a time.

Self-Inflicted Damage

Prophetic Christian leader Rick Joyner received a vision from God whereby he was shown that "the church is doing much more damage to herself through infighting than the enemies without are able to do."¹

Historian Robert M. Utley tells us that in the American West of the 1800s the Indian warrior was "in every feature of individual combat ability . . .

far superior to his white counterpart.” However, the natives lacked effectiveness in battle because each Indian was usually “an individualist—every man for himself. They did what they pleased without the orders of anyone. If he followed a leader, it was someone he respected because he wanted to. Indian warfare [was] just a great chaos of individual encounters with no overall control or command by anyone.”²

In contrast, the white men were following the orders of a unifying leader. They won the West.

Unity Attracts the Lost

Interdenominational fellowship and the eventual merging of denominations is needed for many reasons. One is that the lost are confused by the present setup.

I know of a child who was taken by his mother and stepfather to a Catholic church every other Sunday (the Holy Spirit was quite active in this particular church). The child spent the other Sundays with his biological father who reportedly didn't want him to have anything to do with Catholics. The biological father told his child not to be baptized into the Catholic church because he had already been baptized as a Protestant.

So, instead of being torn away from Satan and encouraged to serve Jesus, the boy was being torn apart trying to satisfy his estranged parents. I was glad when my precious wife Helen told this child that baptism was into Christ, not into a denomination. She told him that no matter which church he joined he must follow Jesus to be saved.

And that is God's truth. We Christians need to present a church that conveys to the world that their vital choice is not between Pentecostalism and fundamentalism, between a Methodist church and a Baptist one, or a community church and a sectarian one. The choice is between God and the devil.

Many unbelievers will never see Jesus in heaven unless they see him now, manifested by the unity of one cooperative organization. Jesus is calling us to harmony so that the world will know that he was sent by God.

Do you care about the lost? If you do, you know that our focus should be on saving the dying, starving, disease-stricken, sin-bound, hell-bound unbelievers of the world. If and when they see us loving one another, working together, and eventually agreeing on every gospel principle, the Lord will become more attractive to them:

John 17:22-23 (Jesus praying)

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

When we tell the lost that God loves them, will they believe it? Will they believe Jesus saves when they can't see him saving us from our own segregation?

The devil uses denominationalism to keep the deceived deceived. A non-Christian once asked me, "If I decided to go to church, Cal, which one would I go to?" His implication was, "How am I going to find the right way if the churches themselves can't agree on what the right way is?" I can't remember how I responded but I hope I told him the differences were mostly minor. This was not his impression.

Frank Bartleman was a key leader during the beginnings of the great Azusa Street revival of 1906-09 in Los Angeles, California. He often prayed all night gripped by the Lord's burden for revival. During one period the spirit of prayer came on him so heavily that he would lay on his bed during the day rolling and groaning. "The Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express," says Romans 8:26. No doubt, Bartleman's prayers had much to do with bringing in the revival.

Bartleman knew the importance of unity for evangelizing the world. He wrote:

God wanted a revival company, a channel through whom He could evangelize the world. . . . He could naturally not accomplish this with a sectarian party. That spirit has been the curse and death of every revival body sooner or later. History repeats itself in this matter.³

When I worked at Heritage USA shortly after Jim Bakker relinquished charge to Jerry Falwell, I overheard a man telling a reporter from CNN that Jerry Falwell doesn't belong at Heritage USA because Heritage is a charismatic organization. He told the international news network that

charismatics and fundamentalists get along like oil and water. My spirit screamed with objection and embarrassment: NO, NO, NO! Don't tell him THAT! The Bible says the world will know us by our love for each other and you're telling them we can't get along?!

Splitting Is Contagious

Dissenting groups breed dissenting groups. Sin, like yeast, "works through the whole batch of dough" (1 Cor. 5:9).

For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints became a sectarian group partly because Joseph Smith, according to his own testimony, was confused by the contentious theological disputes he kept hearing among Christians. Even today, Mormons see Christians scattered into a disarray of various cliques with varying theological persuasions and they surmise, This can't be Christ's church.

Don't misunderstand me. Those of us who are calling for unity are not trying to bring together all religions! That would be grossly wrong as well as gross! It also would be impossible.

2 Corinthians 6:14 LB

Don't be teamed with those who do not love the Lord, for what do the people of God have in common with the people of sin? How can light live with darkness?

Unity Does Not Mean Uniformity

Unity doesn't mean doing away with variety. God created the world with infinite variety. The of all the different species of animals. No two animals are exactly alike. No two trees are exactly alike. No two human beings are identical.

And, more importantly, no two Christians are given exactly the same assignments by God. No two Christian ministry departments specialize in the same gifts. However, **our Father's creativity did not create the hundreds of denominational divisions that exist**, as one Christian once suggested to me. Religion made them—and Satan devised the plan. How do we know God wants us to work together as one team? We know because he inspired Paul to pray that all followers of Jesus will glorify God with one heart and mouth:

Romans 15:5-6

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Operating with one heart doesn't mean a monotonous uniformity without variation. And it doesn't necessarily mean there will only be one church building per town or per community. The Red Cross, for example, may have several outlets in one town. But if people see a Red Cross office on one side of town and another on the other side, they assume that during an emergency the two offices will work in conjunction with one another.

How unfortunate that the world cannot make the same assumption of the body of Christ. And make no mistake, we are in an emergency. People around the world are dying like flies without the eternal red cross.

Unity Brings Efficiency, Life, and Health

Oneness among Christians creates efficiency. I once visited an Episcopal church where the seating capacity was much greater than the number attending. Then I visited a Baptist church in the same town where the same was true. **If these two churches merged, the heating, electric, and building maintenance costs would be cut almost in half.** But as it is, the devil laughs like the Joker in a Batman comic book adventure when he sees the money that could have been spent spreading the good news is being used to pay the painter or the maintenance man. This is not good stewardship with what the Lord has entrusted to us, and it's one reason he isn't entrusting us with more.

Divisiveness deprives us of the authority of the Spirit and other blessings that the Lord Jesus Christ purchased for us in his suffering for our sins.

Paul is talking about divisiveness when he says, "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple" (1 Cor. 3:17). Later in chapter eleven the Corinthians were bringing sickness and even premature death upon themselves partly because they were creating divisions in their selfish abuse of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Selfishness and the resulting division can bring sickness and death. But unity brings health and life.

Unity will increase as we grow in the love and grace of Christ.

Crossing the Lines

Christians of differing styles or traditions are in the habit of not meeting together. God's plan is much better:

Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This verse has been used to discourage Christians from visiting outside their home church, but it doesn't prohibit that at all. Constant confinement to one circle of fellowship contributes to the continuance of divisions that have been in place for generations. Full obedience to this verse will increase unity rather than keep us isolated in the box of our own home church.

When the author of Hebrews told the recipients of his letter to meet together he didn't mean that Christians of one theological persuasion were supposed to meet only with those of the same persuasion. No, born-again Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, Jews, Pentecostals, charismatics, Seventh-day Adventists, Greek Orthodox, etc., will all benefit if they will all meet across denominational lines. Meeting together for worship and for connecting ministries together is a wonderful replacement for rivalry, slander, or even just ignoring each other. Pope John Paul II was right when he told twenty-six leaders of several denominations, "Indeed, is it not the duty of every follower of Christ to work for the unity of all Christians?"

I have a vision of all followers of Jesus periodically visiting beyond their home church. Although I can't say everyone is supposed to, or can, do it, think of how fast the walls would collapse if everyone did!

I envision pastors exchanging pulpits. I imagine one saying to another, "My people need the revelation you have on forgiveness. Please, won't you come speak to us some Sunday?"

One worship song says, "We won't be satisfied with anything ordinary." EvangelicalsandMormonsforJesus.com and other projects like it are for those who are willing to stretch beyond the ordinary. By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the extraordinary is possible!

When Christians Won't Agree

As long as those who do love the Lord fall short of the fullness of the Spirit, there will be disagreements. But our differences don't need to keep us apart. **Throughout church history a common characteristic of great men and women of God has been their ability to rise above petty matters.** For example, Billy Graham's style, theology and crusade procedures were not exactly the same as Oral Roberts' were. They could have snubbed each other. But once when Billy Graham was crusading in Australia, he sent a telegram back to Oral, thanking him for paving the way a year earlier.

Paul told the Corinthians that they were "worldly—mere infants in Christ" (1 Cor. 3:1). He had to give them milk because they weren't ready for solid food (1 Cor. 3:2). Yet at the beginning of the letter he said, "I thank God for you" (1 Cor. 1:4), and near the end of the letter he expressed his hope of spending time with them—more than just "a passing visit," he said (1 Cor. 16:5-7).

He didn't say, "I can't fellowship with you infants—I'm avoiding Corinth on my next missionary journey. And anyone who ever disagrees with me—in any city—will not be allowed to join my new denomination—which I'm naming 'The First Church of Paul the Apostle.'" NO! He didn't say that. He said he thanked God for them and wanted to spend time with them!

Although it's impossible to walk in complete unity until we're in complete agreement, let's at least walk the first eighty miles together. By the time we hit the eighty-mile marker, we'll see our differences melting like wax by the power of Almighty God!

Prophecy

My children, I want you to live and work together as one—the way the Father and Son are one.

For how can the world know the love that is my love unless they see it in you as you express it toward each other? You are my representatives, my chosen instruments, and I need to manifest myself through you, says the Lord.

1 Rick Joyner, *Visions of the Harvest* (Charlotte: Morning Star, 1994), 52.

2 "Indian Weapons & the Warrior Societies." *The Real West*. Host. Kenny Rogers. Executive Prod. Donna E. Lusitana. History Channel, 17 Apr. 2000.

3 Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1980), 68.

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