



Unity in the Body of Christ

“That they all may be one; as thou, father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us” (John 17:21).

George Whitefield and John Wesley were friends and great preachers. As the years went by, their theological differences tended to separate them. Because they both loved the Lord supremely, they did not permit these disagreements to break their friendship.

On Whitefield's last trip to America, he became ill. Barely able to stand in the pulpit, he struggled through the sermon. Worn out, he returned to the inn, but scores of people followed him. With a candle in his hand, he started up the stairs to his room, but stopped. Again he preached the love of God till the candle burned down. Slowly, he climbed the last few stairs, dropped into bed, and died that night in his sleep.

When the news reached English, thousands of people gathered to hear Wesley preach a memorial service. At the close of the service, a lady who had tried to make trouble between the two preachers confronted Wesley.

“Do you think you'll see Whitefield in heaven?” she asked.

Dropping his head, Wesley replied. “No, I don't think I will.”

“I knew it. I just knew that in spite of all the kind things you said, you didn't think he'd be saved.”

“Wait a minute, lady. Don't put words in my mouth.” With tears in his eyes, Wesley spoke slowly, “Here's why I don't think I'll see my friend, George, in heaven. He'll be so close to the throne of God in all its blaze of glory, that I'll not get near enough to even see his face.”

Truly, these men were united in Christ, because they lived out in their lives Christ's words: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Preview

1. What does “unity” mean to you? From the following, check what you believe are the correct answers.

- 1. Unity means that everyone agrees with me.
- 2. Unity means that everyone in my church will believe and behave exactly the same way.
- 3. Unity allows for diversity.
- 4. Since Christ is our peace, He alone can break down the walls of disagreement between us.
- 5. Unity means that even though we don't agree on everything, we still respect each other and learn to live with one another.
- 6. Unity demands uniformity.

(Only 3, 4, and 5 are correct.)

2. What did Christ mean when He prayed that His followers be “one even as we [God and Jesus] are one”?

Have you observed that most problems in the church do not have to do with doctrinal differences? Have you noticed that disunity usually arises over procedures, personal likes and dislikes, and lifestyle?

Knowing that human minds do not all think alike, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in leading your church to answer Christ's prayer for "oneness"—and what is your part?

Points to Ponder

1. Why did Jesus' disciples misunderstand His actions toward a heathen woman, Samaritans, sinners, and the poor?
Prejudice blinded the disciples. They could not see Jesus' unselfish love toward those they hated or thought were beneath them. Selfishness breeds disunity.
In Ephesians 4:3, Paul tells the church to endeavor to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
2. How can the Holy Spirit be the moving force behind church unity? How can God bring "oneness" in a church board meeting with people who have strong opinions, each believing that he or she has the correct solution?

Nuts & Bolts

1. The sevenfold "one" (in Ephesians 4:4-6) emphasizes that complete unity is possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. List each of the seven:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____
 - e. _____
 - f. _____
 - g. _____
2. List some of the barriers that the Holy Spirit breaks down between Christians. _____

3. What is the "one hope" the apostle speaks about?
Titus 2:13: _____
The blessed hope of salvation will be realized when Christ comes the second time.
1 John 3:3: "And every man that hath this _____ in him _____ himself, even as he is pure."

4. Name some illustrations the Bible uses to help us understand the concept of unity in diversity.
- 1 Corinthians 12:12 _____
 - John 15:1-6 _____ : _____

5. Our temperaments, tastes, habits, abilities, and lifestyles are all different. How can we be linked together and joined in a common mission?
- 1 Corinthians 12:5: Differences in _____ but the _____ Lord.
 - 1 Corinthians 12:6: Diversities in _____ but the _____ God.
 - 2 Corinthians 13:11: "Be of good comfort, be of one _____, live in _____."
6. Do diversities of gifts mean a diversity of beliefs? Give your reasons.
- _____
- _____
7. When the world sees Christian unity, what will they conclude?
John 13:35:
- _____
- _____
8. The sad facts are obvious. Christians are not living and working together in harmony and unity. Is there some way this can be achieved?
The secret is found in Christ's prayer found in John 17:11, 22, and 23. Identify these factors:
- John 17:11: _____
 - John 17:22: _____
 - John 17:23: _____
9. Like the hub and spokes of a wheel, the closer the church members (spokes) come to Christ (the hub), the closer they come to each other. What is the simple formula for this unity?
- Galatians 3:26: "Ye are all the _____ of _____ by faith in Christ Jesus."
 - Galatians 3:27: "Put on _____."

- c. Galatians 3:28: "Ye are all _____ in Christ Jesus."
- d. John 15:12: "Love one _____ as I have _____ you."

10. We realize we cannot love as Jesus did. We need help. Where do we find such help?

- a. John 15:4, 5: " _____ in me, and I in you...for without me ye can _____ ."
- b. John 12:32: "And I, if I be _____ up from the earth, will _____ all men unto me."
- c. Galatians 6:2: "Bear ye one another's _____ ."

Words to Remember

Spiritual Gifts: Abilities granted by the Holy Spirit to Christians for growth, nurture, and evangelism.

Equipping: To provide what is needed, to outfit or furnish, to build up.

Global perspective: Focus on the needs of all nations and peoples of the world without any national, cultural, or regional bias or prejudices.

Triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Godhead.

The Difference Between

Attitudes that divide: Selfishness, pride, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, superiority, prejudice, criticism, denunciation, faultfinding, and favoritism.

Attitudes that unite: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I Truly Believe

Have you watched the great white pelicans? The flock lands offshore and forms a semicircle. As if at a signal, they begin to wade toward shore, shoulders touching, with their huge beaks just above the water. Intermittently as they thrash their wings wildly, they scare the fish ahead. When their tight semicircle reaches shore, they have imprisoned a feast of fish, because they acted in unity.

If creatures like pelicans sense that life is really lived in unity, surely we who have power to think and reason can answer Jesus' prayer that we will be one as the Father and Son are one.

If you accept the following statements as true, place a check in the box:

- I believe that God's church is one body composed of those from all nations and peoples, with no distinction of race, nationality, economic status, color, tribe, or gender.
- I believe that, because Christ is transforming each of us into a new person, we are all equal in Him.
- By the grace of God, I will reach out in unity with fellow Christians to witness to all.
- I praise God for the spiritual gifts He has bestowed on His followers, enabling them to achieve unity through diversity.
- I thank God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit for this marvelous oneness, seen in God's adoption of all of us as His children.

My Prayer

Dear Father,

Thank You for Your unselfish love. Teach me to love as You do. Help me to regard others as better than myself, to be gentle, kind, and patient at home, at work, and with my fellow church members. Give me the grace to regard all of God's children as equal and precious. Amen.