

UNITY AND DISUNITY

"...for without me ye can do nothing." Jn 15:5

Believers today must live in unity. However, such unity is not a unity of conformity, where all believers look and act the same. Neither is it a unity of proximity, where believers spend much time with one another. Although true unity may have its expression in some of these ways, it does not consist primarily of them. Godly unity is a unity of life. Every true Christian has been made to partake of the life of the one Spirit. Just as the Jews are all related because they descended from the same father, so we too are all now part of God's family. We are one because God has given us His life, through His Son Jesus. Simply put, we are one in the One, Jesus Christ.

How glorious it is that God has ordained us to share with Him in this tremendous reality! How precious it is and how thankful we should be for it. Since God has generously given us so much, we should give diligent heed to maintain what He has given. In other words, since God has entrusted this unity to us, we should be careful not to lose it. Not only has God given us such a wonderful start in the matter of oneness, He also desires that we grow into deeper unity one with another. It is part of our obligation as believers to mature in this experience. As we grow in Christ, we should also be gaining in this area.

Since, as we seek after God, we are all approaching the same source, when we draw closer to Him we also draw closer to one another. Although we may be starting from many different points, as we draw nearer to Him, we are also drawing closer together. A good analogy of this could be the spokes of a bicycle wheel. On the perimeter of the wheel, they may be quite far apart, but as they approach the center, they draw closer to one another. This is Godly unity.

Let us read again from John 17, verse 21. Jesus is praying, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us." Our unity is in Jesus Christ. In God alone do we have the kind of unity that He prayed for. As we enter into Him and as we come to know Him intimately, we will begin to experience a real spiritual unity with other believers. This unity will manifest itself in brotherly love. God is love; and to know God is to love one another.

As you can see, unless each individual believer commits himself to seek God and to press on into Him, unity—real unity—can never happen. Unless we put aside ourselves and the things which keep us from God, there is no possibility for any kind of deep experience of unity with other members of the body of Christ. If we remain babes in Christ, no doubt we will begin to experience division. For when we are babes and

children, there are many ways in which the Devil can deceive us, divide us and keep us from experiencing unity.

God's desire is that we would all be one. We are builded together into one holy temple for God's eternal habitation. In eternity, we will all be together. We will all be a part of the "one new man" (Eph 2:15) and all be united as the bride of Christ. If we cannot get along here on the earth, I wonder how it will be possible for us to love one another later. (Along these same lines, perhaps we should consider: if we don't love God very much today, how will we enjoy spending eternity in His presence?) Nevertheless, this is the goal: to have unity—a deep Godly unity—with all other believers.

Let me make it very plain that the unity about which we have been speaking is not ecumenicalism. This writer is not advocating gathering together all Christians under one leadership or one organization. Outward unity is of no value unless there is the inward content of reality. There is no need for us to try to put on a big show of "oneness." If our hearts are right before God, the unity that we do possess in Christ will be manifested properly and at the right time. Our desire should be a unity which comes from within and not one that is forced upon us in some way from without. It is good that we agree with our brethren and that we love Jesus Christ, but there is no need for us to join together in some kind of worldwide organization and begin building another Tower of Babel. If we are only faithful to love one another and to take care of our part in the work of God, someday the whole building will be put together when He is ready. Let us faithfully follow Jesus every day and not attempt to build something for our own glory.

Since we are discussing unity, perhaps we should also speak briefly about disunity. We as believers need to be one with all Christians. In fact, God commands it! Yet, He also provides certain exceptions. Unfortunately, these exceptions have been used by many Christians to justify dividing themselves from the rest of Christ's body. The very scriptures which God has given to us to maintain unity have been used by immature believers to fragment and separate the body of Christ.

In general, there are two kinds of persons with whom, even if they profess to be believers, we can have no unity. Although there are many different scriptures in the New Testament which talk about our disassociating ourselves from believers for one reason or another, for the most part they can all be put into two general categories.

First of all, there is the believer (or the perhaps false believer) who deviates from "the faith." Now what exactly is "the faith"? The faith includes all the essential items regarding Jesus' own person and work. Among these things are: His birth through a virgin (the incarnation), His deity (the fact that He is God), His death on the cross and the shedding of His blood for the forgiveness of sins (the atonement), His bodily resurrection, His giving of new life to men (regeneration), and His promise of coming again to receive us unto Himself. These items about the person and work of Jesus Christ are what is known as "the faith." A true Christian can believe many things about a variety of subjects and unity can still be maintained. But if a believer deviates from faith in these items, he is a heretic and a reprobate from the faith and we should have nothing more to do with him. With such a one, there is no way we can have true unity. If he does not believe in these things, then he does not believe in the real Lord. He is not following the genuine Jesus. Since it is only in Jesus that we can have unity, when someone is in error about these things, there can be no true unity. So the first category of the people from whom we should disassociate is that of the heretic—the individual who is in error about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The second category of persons from whom we should disassociate is that of

persistent, unrepentant sinners. Every believer sins. Praise the Lord we have the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us from sin! Yet there are some believers who persistently engage in immorality and sin of one kind or another. Drunkenness, fornication, division, arguing (strife), debate, backbiting, idolatry and many other things are sins in which some believers refuse to stop their participation. They know that their actions are sin, yet even when exhorted to do so, will not abandon them. When a believer is a persistent and unrepentant sinner, we should also have nothing more to do with him.

Jesus Christ is separate from sin. As we walk in Him and have fellowship one with another, His blood cleanses us from every sin (I Jn 1:7). Yet when a brother persistently engages in sin, there is no way for us to have unity with him. To do so is to compromise our faith in a holy God and in the purity of Jesus Christ. Since our unity is established through the Holy Spirit and in the life of God, when another believer's relationship with God is interrupted by unrepentant sin, there can no longer be any true unity. We as believers can have no unity with sin.

However, let us be very careful in this area. God is also full of mercy and His children should be this way too. It is only after much seeking of God and fellowshiping one with another, that we should disassociate ourselves from anyone. (Actually this too, as with everything else in the church should be according to God's clear leading.) Let us not be too hasty to cast another brother out. But if it is necessary, this is what we must do.

Thank God that He has given to Christians such a wonderful enjoyable experience as unity with other believers today. Aside from knowing and loving Jesus Christ, this is the greatest experience that we can have. Anyone who has tasted of deep brotherly love in both spiritual and practical unity with other believers, will understand what I mean. This is the church in reality. The experience of unity in the Spirit with other believers every day is the experience of the church. To know the church is to know unity, and to have the real church is to have a genuine unity with all believers with whom we come in contact.

Surely brotherly love is unsurpassed. It is an experience which every believer needs to have every day. Without it, our walk with God can only be lonely and individual. As an individual, we can never experience or express the body of Christ in any kind of full way. When this unity is lacking, so is our church experience. But our God has promised us better things. He has called us into a love and unity with one another which even the world will be able to see. Let us open our hearts to Him today. May we seek Him that He would lead us into this kind of deep Godly experience of unity. In this way we will begin to experience the reality of His body and be the church for which He prayed. Oh how much God desires this! How He longs to lead each of His children into such a rich experience of unity. Open up to Him, seek Him, call upon Him, that He might make each of us a vital part of what He is doing.