

This Should Be the No. 1 Prayer Priority for the Whole Church

This year's focus for the National Day of Prayer on Thursday, May 3, was Christian unity.

Jesus started the Christian Unity Prayer Movement when He prayed that the believers would be united in Him and united with each other so the world would know that God sent him (John 17:20-23).

Almost since the beginning of Christianity, believers have quarreled about Christian doctrine and church government. The first Jerusalem Council served as an example of a favorably resolved dispute (Acts 15). However, other disputes resulted in division and treatment of opponents as non-Christians. For example, some Protestants who believe in salvation only through faith will recite many doctrinal differences with Catholics, claiming those make them un-Christian although Catholics share their belief in salvation only through faith. The critics have forgotten the words of the apostle Paul, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you" (Rom. 15:7a, NIV).

Instead of myriad doctrinal tests, the apostle Paul tells how to know if we are in Christ:

"If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved, for with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:9-10).

In other words, those who are justified by faith and say so are in Christ. If you are in Christ and those with whom you

disagree are in Christ, you are united with them in Christ whether you admit it or not.

Although our unity comes through Christ, many denominations and doctrines create a great diversity within the body of Christ. Lutheran theologian Oscar Cullman said, "Unity in the church ... is unity in diversity ... recognizing others in all their variety as true Christians." Pope Francis has said, "Unity brought by the Spirit can harmonize every diversity." Unity in diversity recognizes the contributions of other streams of Christianity and blends them together in a symphony of harmony. It is a unity of the Spirit, not in doctrine or church government.

The church has come a long way since the 16th and 17th centuries, when being a Protestant in France or a Catholic in England could be a death sentence. The French Edict of Nantes, in effect for less than a century, and the English Act of Tolerance were important steps toward Paul's admonition to accept brother Christians. The revivalists of the Great Awakening and the second Great Awakening first transcended their denominations, achieving a forerunner of unity in diversity. The charismatic movement brought about spiritual unity, as Christians across many denominations shared in the same experiences and often worshiped together.

Even so, much remains to be done to bring together the body of Christ. Today one of the worst schisms in the American church has arisen between the social gospel and the evangelical gospel, and the accompanying politicization of faith. We must come together to care for the poor and needy while reaching the lost with the love of Jesus. We must also transcend politics, guiding both of our political parties to embrace Christian policies.

After the pope sent a video of reconciliation to Kenneth Copeland in 2014 many national and international church leaders joined together in Christian unity. However, the

urgent need to unite the body of Christ now must be communicated from the national leadership of movements and denominations to the local churches. The city fathers must become champions of unity, bringing the body of Christ together to impact their communities.

The prayer of Jesus in John 17 is not only about unity. It is for unity with a purpose,

“That the world may believe” (John 17:21b).

Let us join with Jesus in His prayer for unity. {eo}

Ron Allen is a Christian businessman, CPA and author who serves in local, national and international ministries, spreading a message of reconciliation to God, to men and between believers. He is founder of the International Star Bible Society, telling how the heavens declare the glory of God; the Emancipation Network, which helps people escape from financial bondage; and co-founder with his wife, Pat, of Corporate Prayer Resources, dedicated to helping intercessors.