

VIDEO: George O. Wood Issues a Call for Unity

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem is one of the most recognized churches in Christendom. According to tradition, the church is built over Golgotha where Jesus was crucified and where He was laid to rest in the tomb.

As you enter the church, you look up and high on the wall to the right is a ladder. We know, from an oil painting done in 1820, that it was there—in the exact same location. So, we know it has not been moved from its spot in at least two centuries.

Why? Because six different groups occupy this church—the Greek Orthodox, the Roman Catholic, the Assyrian, the Coptic, the Ethiopian, the Armenian—and they can't agree to whom the ladder belongs. And because they can't agree, they've never moved the ladder. Not only that, these groups have been so contentious over the years that finally the keys to the church were turned over to two Muslim families because the Christians couldn't agree who should have access. From time to time the Israeli police have been called out to break up fights between the groups over turf.

It's a horrible representation of Christianity in the world in which we live.

An Orthodox Jew who was observing this problem said, "You Christians can't get your message across because you have so many differences. Your Jesus is the only one who said *Love your enemies*, but you don't follow your Jesus, and as a result, you make no difference in this world."

Those are powerful words, and they are a powerful indictment.

We can look at historic Christianity and say, *They need to get*

their differences together; they need to demonstrate more unity; and what a shame that they are disagreeing in the face of a watching world.

But what about us?

I know of so many stories of division in the church, of anonymous letters and disagreements over things as small as what translation of the Bible to use, where to place the instruments, what to sing, who should be in leadership. We are not immune.

The Megaphone of Disagreement

We live in a day of the Internet, which has made it possible for anyone who has the slightest complaint to have a megaphone to the world to announce his or her disagreement. Jesus never said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you agree 100 percent with one another." He said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another" (John 13:35).

And I'm absolutely amazed today at what divides believers from one another. We can agree on 90 percent, 95 percent, but on the 5 percent, if you don't agree with me, then you're a heretic, you're outside the fold, or you're not really one of us. Granted we all must agree upon core doctrines, but we must be careful not to let our preferences be elevated to the level of doctrine.

I have noticed in my pastoral ministry and in my life that the people who criticize the most are those doing the least amount of evangelism. I want to encourage all of us to focus on what Jesus said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." That is absolutely the key to everything we do.

I appeal to you as the body of Christ to focus on Jesus, on reaching this lost world, on evangelism and discipleship. Let's not allow any who want to turn our attention to

disagreement on issues that won't matter 100 years from now divide and fracture us.

We know we are not going to agree on everything, but let's allow our disagreements to be conducted in a spirit of love. Will you join with me in coming together and to pray the prayer of Jesus that we might be one? Can we demonstrate not just with our words, but with our actions that we are truly Christ's disciples and have love for one another?

Like Precious Oil

As pilgrims come to Jerusalem they sing the Psalms of Ascents, which begin with Psalm 120 and end with Psalm 134. Near the end there is Psalm 133, which says, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion."

The psalmist uses two metaphors to describe unity. One metaphor is the anointing oil on Aaron, the high priest, that occurs once in a high priest's lifetime and once in a generation. The second is the dew of Hermon. Mount Hermon is 200 miles north of Jerusalem, so in fact the dew doesn't even fall on Mount Zion—the Temple Mount. The psalmist appears to be saying unity is so rare among brothers that it occurs only once in a lifetime or not at all—and that's why it's so precious.

I'm appealing to you, that unity not be rare in our midst, but rather that *unity* be the word that describes us. The apostle Paul never identified criticism as a fruit of the Spirit. Peace, joy, love, faithfulness, goodness, kindness and gentleness, these are the qualities that we are called to live out as disciples of Jesus Christ.

So could we do that? Could we march forward in unity? Could we spend a lot of time in prayer? Could we focus upon what is

creative and constructive above the critical and corrective?
Can we really serve Jesus and by our words and our deeds we
let this watching world know that we are Christ's disciples?

George O. Wood *is the general superintendent of the Assemblies
of God.*