

Why We Must Be Unified

The church will not be able to fulfill its calling to reach this generation if we do not function as a unified body.

✘ Have you ever taken careful note of jigsaw puzzle pieces before they are put together? Each is unique. Each has a place. Each requires the others to find completeness. The Christian community today is discovering new horizons of identity and maturity as the people of God. The fact that a new day lies before us is capturing the attention of ministry leaders around the country. Central to this new day is the idea of the unity of believers. It's been called ecumenism, solidarity and a few other names, but it remains an essential part of the intent of God for the wholeness of His body, the church.

Christians united can fulfill the Great Commission. This necessity to develop a sense of solidarity is heightened by the fact that we have continued as Christians to fulfill the Great Commission by reaching diverse people. In so doing, we face the need to relax the tight tensions of our own generational, cultural and stylistic influences that have often dominated the agenda of the church.

African-American Christians, as well as other converted minorities, have developed an ability to assemble and embark on causes and

challenges with
Christians from diverse backgrounds. They have found that the collaborative
kingdom benefits and the need to multiply outweigh the human impulse to divide
over minor differences.
Similarly, all of us across the evangelical spectrum must unite, like
multiple pieces of a puzzle, for the purpose of impacting the secular empires
that have increasingly dominated so many areas of our contemporary life. It is
always while God's people sleep that the enemy comes, catching us unaware and
segmented.

Fragmentation compromises us. The fragmentation of the broader church
community will ultimately compromise our common mission and weaken our ability
to stand together on many political, social and moral fronts. Non-Christian
groups have united a strong attack against us in government, community and
culture. We don't need to look far to see the secular, homosexual and postmodern
agendas strategically making inroads in politics, entertainment and community
influence.

If we continue to major on the minors while others unite over the major
issues, we will become distracted by internal murmuring and miss the clearly
defined mark that we have been assigned by Christ Himself. Too often we allow
our primary emphasis to be supplanted by a secondary distraction. Defending our

faith in the hostile environment of the enemy is too often replaced with the self-flagellating mutilation of a body turned against itself. Clearly this is not the directive or mandate that we have been given by Christ.

It's time to awake. As we gradually emerge from the slumber of distraction and, in some cases, indifference, we must shake off the lethargy and obsession with eliminating differences among ourselves. Sameness is not our goal. Expanding the kingdom is.

That does not mean we should give up healthy discourse as a means to defend our orthodoxy and temper one another's extremes. But it does mean we guard our hearts in "upbuilding one another" and always remember our real mission.

As the church in America becomes increasingly diverse, we must be prepared for a diversity of opinions. The appropriate response to that diversity is not to eliminate it or to be encumbered by our own need to deliberate over every issue. Rather, our response should be to welcome and embrace it as a fuller picture of the kingdom.

This enables the church to infiltrate the systemic structure of our world and show our relevance to the ills of this generation. Then and only then can we emerge as an army of dry bones unified by one clarion call to see the message of Christ move forward. The culture around us will not wait for

us to finish
bantering, marketing and broadcasting our fights in print and
on the air. The
evolving mentality of the church must reflect the concerns of
the people it has
won to Christ and not just the opinions of those who won them.

Unity without diluting distinctives. Accepting one another
without
diluting our faith will not weaken the well-tempered character
of the church,
nor will it alter the centralized message of the lordship of
Christ. In fact, it
will be strengthened. As a human body moves from adolescence
to adulthood, it
does not become a completely different body. It matures and
becomes stronger
through development and growth.

Within the church, unity is predicated upon the kingdom
principles of mutual
submission to Jesus Christ, the sake of the mission and an
expression of the
nature of the Godhead.

In the kingdom of God, unity equals diversity. It is part of
the paradoxical
nature of the kingdom that we find difficult to comprehend
apart from a kingdom
context. At face value, unity and diversity seem
contradictory. Yet within the
economy of God, they are more than compatible—they are
synonymous.

We must understand that the opposite of diversity is not
unity, but sameness.
Without the center-point of the lordship of Jesus Christ, any
effort toward

unity results in negotiated cooperation and tolerance at the lowest common denominator: sameness. Kingdom unity, however, transcends the particulars of diversity. It leads to synergy. It is the embodiment of completeness under the headship of Christ. It truly epitomizes the kingdom principle of being more than the sum of its parts.

Were each piece of the puzzle to be the same, there would be no hope of unity, and certainly no hope of the beautiful synergy in the final mosaic that the pieces create together. Inherent in the metaphorical description of the church as a body is the necessity of diversity in submission. The body is not healthy if there is no submission to the head. Yet it literally thrives on diversity. Arteries, veins, corpuscles all form a superhighway whose uniqueness does not deter its ability to work in harmony with other body parts in causing the body to thrive.

Nor would our bodies function if all parts duplicated the appearance and specificity of one organ. It is safe to conclude that the apostle Paul has this understanding of the body when he promotes an idea of interdependence of the diverse members of the body of Christ gaining maximum systemic function.

Without diversity, unity is meaningless. Further, the careful student of the Word must always come face to face with the fact that

while God is concerned with our nature, He is also concerned with our effectiveness in fulfilling His agenda in the world.

The famous “unity” passage in John 17 does not simply call us to unity for its own sake. There is a mission attached. To assume that our end goal is unity misses the ever-present theme of redemption throughout Scripture.

Jesus prayed that we might be one “that the world may know that You have sent Me and have loved them” (see v. 20). Without a clear mission under God, our efforts at finding unity serve no purpose but to impress ourselves. In this careful balance between our nature of oneness and the mission of making Him known is the clearest example of being whole, integrated people.

Who we are and what we do are inextricably intertwined. Our nature of unity serves our mission of declaration. If we are to remain fruitful in this new millennium, we must prepare ourselves for the contributions of others whose ideologies may differ on minor points, but who are equally committed to the nature and mission of the church.

Christ, the keystone to unity. Finally, the keystone of Christian unity is the very nature of God Himself: His holiness and His oneness. In His holiness there is purity of motive and action. In His oneness

there is the
mystery of the three in one. Both are reflected in the healthy
body of Christ.

We, then, who are the church, are called to be the reflection
of the nature of

God: purity in motive and living the mystery of oneness.

In His diversity there is an essential oneness. It is more
than cooperation.

It is unity in spirit. Because it is inherent in the Godhead,
it is likewise

inherent in the body. Each puzzle piece has the whole latent
within it. That's

what gives it meaning.

Yet without the other parts, the whole remains latent and is
nothing more

than a dream. For the fullness of the kingdom to be seen in a
piece, it must

find unity with the others who are different.

Evangelicals shy away from anything labeled "ecumenical"
because among more

liberal groups this priority has often resulted in an
eviscerated message of

goodwill, lacking the spiritual power of the gospel. In
reality, the call to

Christian unity represents a new chapter in the ongoing
growth, shaping and

maturation of the church in America.

In unity exists power, completeness and the beauty of our
common Lord. Truly

a new day is before us—a day in which the disconnected pieces
of the puzzle are

gradually and gracefully connected until the world can get the
picture of who

the church is and how we all fit into the Master's original

plan.