

Fractured Christianity

The Bible speaks of “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” (Ephesians 4:3). In the New Testament record, the only time that this ideal existed was immediately after Pentecost (Acts 2:44-47). Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for divisions to develop within the Church that exist to this present day.

After the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit, there were Jewish Christians who believed that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and observe the Law in order to be full Christians, even though the first Gentile family received the Holy Spirit apart from this by faith. Also, the family received the Holy Spirit before water baptism and laying on of hands. This should have made it clear to everyone that salvation is by personal faith in Christ. God doesn’t always do things according to our theological formulas. Eventually, the Council of Jerusalem was convened to settle this dispute (Acts 15:22-29).

The interesting thing about the Council was that it included representatives from the whole Church, and not just the apostles. It also included presbyters and the brethren. The concluding letter to the Gentiles was from the entire assembly, and not just the apostles; and that it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to all of them. The central authority figure was the Holy Spirit. It was not any particular person or group at the Council. Apparently, for the purposes of this council, the Holy Spirit in the presbyters and the brethren, was of equal value to the Holy Spirit in the apostles.

The Council of Jerusalem demonstrated the difference between

how the role of the Holy Spirit was viewed at the council, and how it is viewed today. At later councils, authority shifted away from the Holy Spirit, to those who presided at a council: and they were usually clerics. This pattern spilled over into the non-Catholic churches after the Reformation. When the place of the Holy Spirit is diminished by human authority, cohesion within the Church diminishes, and divisions become the norm. God is the one who enables us to have agreement among each other (Romans 15:5-6). This agreement comes about through the spiritual discernment that we have when the Spirit of God is within us.

Paul tells us that the things which God has prepared for those of us who love Him, are revealed to us by His Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). He calls this the mind of Christ. Without this, we cannot know the deep things of God regardless of how much Bible knowledge we may have accumulated. The natural man can only know human things, and not the things that are freely given to us by God. They will be regarded as foolishness because they can only be spiritually discerned. As a result, a natural person cannot understand a spiritual person, and would be unable to instruct that person.

John tells us that "the anointing which you have received of him abides in you, and you need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teaches you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it has taught you, you shall abide in him," (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). Abiding in Christ brings us to a place of spiritual discernment that is not available for those who reject a close relationship with Him. Too often, we substitute our pastors or the clergy for what is our responsibility.

We should be able to "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good," (1 Thessalonians 5:21). This requires us to be more than just passive listeners in a fractured Christianity that results from the absence of spiritual discernment. When the Holy Spirit is not emphasized in a religious organization, His

influence diminishes accordingly.

Paul warned that divisions in the Church result from carnality (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). There can be no unity of the Spirit when church activities assume greater importance than instruction on the place of the Holy Spirit and His spiritual discernment. This needs to be promoted and valued in a church. Biblical knowledge, of itself, is not a substitute for the mind of Christ, because the mind of Christ is not the accumulation of Biblical knowledge, as is often taught. This tells me that a greater emphasis on the Holy Spirit needs to be promoted in churches because, without it, we may not be getting the teaching required for arriving at a sound relationship with God.

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