

Unity In Diversity

Introduction. This is not an easy subject, but it is a necessary one. The Bible is full of both beautiful exhortations and stern warnings. We need a balance of each. To that end, we begin by noting that apostasy was foretold (Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-5; 2 Timothy 4:1-4). Because of this, we will examine how unity in diversity is bleeding over from the religious world into our churches.

I. Unity In Diversity Then And Now

- A. The restoration plea.
 - 1. "Unity in matters of faith."
 - 2. "Liberty in matters of opinion."
 - 3. "Charity in all things."
- B. Today's application.
 - 1. "Liberty in matters of faith."
 - 2. "Liberty in matters of opinion."
 - 3. "Tolerance in all things" (except toward those who oppose).

II. Unity Demands Agreement

- A. Unity is based on God's word (John 17:20-21; Ephesians 4:13).
- B. Unity is based on all of us walking in God's truth (2 John 4, 6).
 - 1. Romans 12:16 — "be of the same mind."
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 1:10 — "speak the same thing."
 - 3. 2 Corinthians 13:11 — "be of one mind."
 - 4. Philippians 2:2 — "one accord, one mind."
 - 5. Philippians 3:16 — "mind the same thing."
 - 6. 1 Peter 3:8 — "all of one mind."
- C. Truth can be known and understood (John 8:32; 17:17; Ephesians 3:4).
- D. Truth is always consistent because God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

III. "Every Congregation Has Doctrinal Disagreements"

- A. Tolerance with human opinion and judgment is appropriate (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8, 10). However, to tolerate evil or error is wrong (Ephesians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
- B. Paul refused to give way to false brethren so that the truth would prevail (Galatians 2:4-5). "Unity in diversity" does not equal "contending earnestly" (Jude 3).
- C. Principles of Romans 14.
 - 1. "Receive one another."
 - 2. "Do not dispute."
 - 3. "Do not judge."
 - 4. No time limits.
 - 5. Do not contend.
 - 6. Differences continue.
 - 7. Fully assured in own mind.
 - 8. God receives.
 - 9. No limit to fellowship.

D. Principles of Ephesians 4-5.

1. "Bring to perfection."
2. Bring to unity of the faith.
3. Save from false doctrines.
4. Allow time to grow.
5. Contend.
6. Bring to repentance.
7. Have no fellowship.
8. God does not receive.
9. Limit to fellowship.

E. Quotations regarding fellowship:

1. Leroy Garrett: "Lest we forget that the earliest church, which we may think of as united amidst substantial diversity, had no New Testament Scriptures upon which to unite. If the little band of saints in Philippi were of 'the same mind in the Lord,' as the apostle's letter to them would indicate, it was not because they had read the New Testament and agreed upon its contents, for the writings that make up that portion of the Bible were not yet determined and some were not yet written. So, it was something else (or someone else) beside doctrinal conformity to a book that united them, and so, when Paul wrote to them he could refer not only to the fellowship of the Spirit but also to their abundant joy in Jesus Christ."
2. Carl Ketcherside: "All of the brothers I have are 'brothers in error.' There are no other kind. Those who think they are not are in the worst error of all. But if they were good enough for God to accept they are not too bad for me to acknowledge. They can be my brothers on the same basis they are His children, and I will not stigmatize them as causing division when they are simply victims of it like the rest of us."
3. Cecil Hook: "In Romans 14 and 15, Paul taught the saints to love and respect each other and to live in harmony even though they had some differing convictions ... Those who have gained freedom in Christ are free to accept brothers who bear the fruit of the Spirit even though they are not in total doctrinal agreement."
4. Ed Harrell: "Within certain limits, God grants to Christians the right to a private conscience in matters of 'faith.' I believe that right is discussed in Romans 14. However, whether or not one accepts my exegesis of that passage, honest minds must acknowledge the reality of a past and present Christian world that tolerates contradictory teachings and practices on important moral and doctrinal questions."
5. Bob Owen: "Now the fellow who thought it could be a sin to eat those meats had to look at the other fellow and think he was sinning. Had to. In Rome, the fellow who thought it was a sin to eat any kind of meat would have to sin if you ate a piece of meat. And yet Paul taught them that they should accept each other."

IV. Faulty Reasoning For Unity In Diversity

A. Procedure.

1. Cite the rule.
 2. Make an exception to the rule.
 3. Make the exception the rule.
- B. Illustration #1.
1. God expects us to understand His will (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17; John 8:32; 1 John 2:3; Matthew 7:21).
 2. No Christian has perfect knowledge.
 3. Therefore, we can have fellowship in doctrinal disagreements.
- C. Illustration #2.
1. Jesus has taught God's will on divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9; et al.).
 2. No Christian has perfect knowledge on this issue ("lack of clarity").
 3. Therefore, we can have fellowship with different doctrinal positions on divorce and remarriage.
- D. Illustration #3.
1. The New Testament prohibits fellowship with sinful beliefs and practices (Ephesians 5:11; 2 John 9-11).
 2. No Christian has perfect knowledge of sinful beliefs and practices.
 3. Therefore, we can fellowship those who have sinful beliefs and practices.
- E. Illustration #4.
1. Weak brother believes the strong brother sins.
 2. Paul said to "Receive him ..." in Romans 14:1-3.
 3. Therefore, we can receive brethren in sin.

V. Examples Of Unity In Diversity

- A. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 8:5-39; Romans 6:3, 6).
 2. Saved before baptism, sprinkling, infant baptism, and baptism by proxy.
- B. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. The Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-26).
 2. Monthly observance and Transubstantiation.
- C. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
 2. Piano, organ, choir, and soloist.
- D. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9).
 2. Tithing, car wash, raffle, etc.
- E. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Organization (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:2; 1 Timothy 3:1-13).
 2. Pope, pastor, and deacons without elders.
- F. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Church work (1 Thessalonians 1:8; Acts 11:20-23, 27-30).
 2. Recreation, sponsoring church, and human institutions.
- G. Bible unity/man's diversity.
1. Morality (1 Corinthians 15:33; Galatians 5:17-23; Titus 2:11-14).
 2. Homosexuality, gambling, and social drinking.

- H. Bible unity/man's diversity.
 1. Worship (John 4:24; Matthew 15:8-9; Hebrews 11:4).
 2. Christmas, Easter, pageants, dramas, etc.
- I. Bible unity/man's diversity.
 1. Divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:32; 19:9; Mark 10:11-12; Luke 16:18; Romans 7:1-3; 1 Corinthians 7:10-11).
 2. Homosexual weddings, alien sinners not accountable, second putting away, Christian not bound, guilty party may remarry, and adultery redefined.

VI. Other Subjects Susceptible To Unity In Diversity

- A. The literal interpretation of Genesis 1-11.
- B. Hell is an annihilation.
- C. The house church movement.
- D. The A.D. 70 doctrine.
- E. Women's roles in the church.
- F. Mutual edification.
- G. No local treasury.
- H. The deity of Christ.

VII. Fellowship Some Sins, But Not All?

- A. The "rules" of unity and diversity.
 1. Individual, not congregational.
 2. Not factional or immoral.
 3. No clear violation of truth.
 4. Does not shame the group.
 5. Does not upset the group.
 6. Local autonomy decides which sins to receive.
 7. Fully assured in own mind.
- B. But what if we apply these rules to idolatry, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, Premillennialism, homosexuality, gambling, alcohol, fornication and adultery, and divorce and remarriage?

VIII. Unity In Diversity In The Past

- A. What damage has this mindset caused?
 1. Tolerance of error.
 2. Denominational-style unity.
 3. Doctrinal looseness.
 4. The destruction of the faith of Christians.
 5. A trail of broken churches.

Conclusion. There is a great difference in believing the truth and standing for the truth (Ezekiel 22:30-31). There will come a day when we must decide what we will stand for on these subjects. One older preacher could not believe the kinds of error we are dealing with now (2 Timothy 3:13), but we cannot give up the fight. Brethren have "went out" from us, and we must "reprove" them (1 John 2:19; Ephesians 5:11).