

Study 18

The Unity
JESUS
commanded

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1Corinthians 1:10

I wonder what a perfectly united Church would look like? One of the most common laments of Church leaders is the lack of unity among the Church. Ironically, one of the greatest obstacles to Church unity is Church leaders!

1. What was the theme of Christ's last prayers before His crucifixion?
(John 17:11, 21-22)
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Unity is different to *unison*. Unity involves purpose, direction, common goals, and cooperation. Genuine *unity* incorporates *diversity* (differences). That is, you only need *unity* when you have differences but are trying to achieve the same thing.

2. How did Paul describe unity the Church in Romans 12:5? How does this show us that unity involves differences?
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Unison is sameness. It doesn't tolerate differences. While unity demands being of the "same mind" (1Peter 3:8) it doesn't mean we have to think the same way. We can be united in Christ because we are all committed to His Cause of seeing God glorified throughout the whole earth, *but* we can approach it in different ways from different perspectives and even with different interpretations of the Bible. One of the principle ingredients of unity, then, is a gracious attitude.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.

1Peter 3:8

3. Note what Peter said was necessary for believers to be united in First Peter 3:8-
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We can therefore do things differently, and even disagree with each, but still be united! One of the hallmarks of mature Christianity is being able to disagree with another Christian yet still warmly fellowship with them. Unity in Christ demands agreement on the main issues of our understanding of –

- God
- The human condition
- Salvation
- Godly living



There are secondary issues that, while being important, should not divide us. But this doesn't mean we can't discuss our differences. While unity involves agreement, it demands acceptance! We shouldn't confuse agreement with acceptance. In a truly united community of believers there is some agreement but a lot of acceptance.

DON'T CONFUSE ACCEPTANCE WITH AGREEMENT. When someone in the growth process opens up and becomes vulnerable, and another person gives her honest feedback, she commonly feels persecuted and wrongfully judged. She thinks, "That criticism proves he does not truly accept me." Many people will even leave relationships because they feel unaccepted. They will say, "That church/group/counsellor is so unaccepting of people. I need to find a place where there is grace." What they are asking for, in reality, is license, which God forbids (Romans 6:15; Galatians 5:13).

"HOW PEOPLE GROW", Dr Henry Cloud, Dr John Townsend, page 156-157

4. In Ephesians 4:13 we are told that God desires unity for the Church and Ephesians 4:15 describes how this can be made possible. How would our unity be challenged or strengthened if we applied Ephesians 4:15 to our fellowship?
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Unity requires acceptance of others who have different ideas and even values yet are still brothers or sisters in Christ.

5. What does Romans 14:1 and 15:7 call for between Christians and how can we do this?
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For there to be unity there must be the building of relationships between believers. This process will inevitably lead to disagreements, offence, and tension – but it doesn't have to lead to schism, bitterness or hostility.

ONE DAY, IN A group I was leading, a woman confronted another woman about something the other woman had done. When she spoke of the problem, speaking the truth in love, the other woman responded, owned the behaviour, and they reconciled.

As I was listening, I noticed something interesting. A new member of the group was staring at them with a dumbfounded look on her face. Finally I interrupted them and asked the new member what was going on.

"I was just watching them," she said. "I have never seen that before."

"Seen what?" I asked.

"Well, she was mad at her and told her. And then they didn't get into a big fight. They just talked about it and now it is okay. I have never seen that."

The new member explained that it was the first time she had ever seen anyone bring up a problem with someone else and not seen a nasty outcome. It had been different from both sides. The way the first woman had brought up the problem was different from anything she had ever seen, and the way the second woman responded nondefensively was just as different.

Cloud & Townsend, page 140

6. How can we as a church community become more united?
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7. According to John 17:22-23, what is at stake for the Church to be united?
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Amen.