

The Unity of the Body

By David Phillips

In a world of diversity and selfishness, most “religious people” have accepted the philosophy of, “Since we cannot all understand the Bible alike and we cannot all agree on one thing, the only way to create unity between churches is to accept the diversity of doctrines that are being taught and to accept that we are all just taking different roads to the same place.”

As wise and all comprehensive as this may sound in the world, it contradicts in every way the instruction God has given us concerning the unity that is to take place in His church. In fact, we are told that where such divisions and doctrinal differences exist, there can only be divisiveness and carnality, not unity. “*For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, ‘I am of Paul,’ and another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?*” (1 Cor. 3:3-4)? Therefore, in order that we may avoid such vain philosophies, let us seek to understand how we may attain unity in the body of Christ such as pleases our Lord and Savior.

The Prayer for Unity

What might be the most motivating passage for striving to attain is the prayer that Jesus offered on our behalf in which He says, “*I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me*” (John 17:20-21). Along with providing us with the motivation, this passage is also excellent for showing us the nature of godly unity, for Jesus likens it to the relationship that exists between Himself and the Father. “*...that they all may be one, as You, Father are in Me...*” Let us briefly compare this principle with the “unity and diversity” movement that is taking place today.

If the unity that we must strive for today exists, as so many people have come to believe, by our agreeing to peacefully disagree with each other’s differences, then let us consider the effects that would have on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Note: I am speaking as a fool in this paragraph. God may say, “We will offer them salvation without baptism.” But Jesus would be disobeying the Father by saying, “No, I want them to believe AND be baptized to be saved” (Mark 16:16). God may say, “Let’s mention hell, but not really send the disobedient there because I don’t want to see them suffer.” But Jesus would say, “No, we will go ahead and send them to hell” (Matthew 25:41). God may say, “Once a person is saved, I will make it so that he cannot fall from My grace.” But Jesus would say, “No, if they stop living by my standard they will fall from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

Does this sound like the unity that exists between the Father and the Son? No, it does not! And any person who would say yes to this is a blasphemous heretic! This picture in no way represents the unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Even so, it in no way represents the unity that Jesus prayed for between His disciples. Remember, Jesus prayed that we be one, just as He and the Father are one. Therefore we must first learn the nature of their unity, before we can attain it in ourselves.

The Unity of the Father and the Son

In various passages throughout the gospels Jesus describes the relationship between Himself and the Father, illustrating how we might attain to that unity today. Notice:

John 8:19: “*You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.*” We can know the Father through Jesus because Jesus is one with the Father. Jesus did all that the Father commanded, Jesus taught all that the Father desired and He only spoke and did that which the Father gave Him.

John 12:48-50: *“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him -- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken on My own authority; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak.”* Again, how are the Father and the Son one? Because they are in total and complete agreement, as it says in Amos 3:3, *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* Everything that the Father gave Jesus to say, so He said. Everything that the Father gave Jesus to do, so He did. Therefore it is written, *“Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:8-9). As if this point is not clear enough, Jesus makes it even clearer so that we cannot be mistaken.

John 8:28-29: *“When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please Him.”*

Let us clearly understand: How are the Father and the Son one?

- Because Jesus only speaks that for which He has been given authority by the Father (John 12:49).
- Because Jesus was obedient to everything that God commanded (Hebrews 5:8-9; John 8:28).
- Because Jesus did nothing of Himself, but only that which was of the Father (John 5:30).
- Because Jesus always does those things that please the Father (John 8:29).
- By these things Jesus was able to say that He was in the Father, and that the Father was also in Him because He was doing the will of the Father, just as Jesus was in Paul because Paul did the will of Jesus (compare John 17:23; Galatians 2:20).

Let us strive to fully comprehend what a beautiful picture we are looking at in these passages. Certainly, there may be an aspect of unity between the Father and the Son on a spiritual level that we do not know or see or comprehend. But if that is the case, Jesus saw no need to reveal it to us. However, He did see the need to reveal the type of unity that exists between Him and the Father that we CAN understand and attain today! Therefore we are able to witness the incredible relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. And what is even more wonderful, we can strive to have that type of relationship between us and God and between us and our brethren, and Jesus shows us exactly how!

The Unity of the Body

We have seen the pattern of unity that exists between the Father and the Son. Let us now remember Jesus' prayer, *“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us”* (John 17:20-21). Not only did Jesus pray for this, but Paul exhorted and commanded the churches to strive for this relationship in that He wrote, *“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment”* (1 Cor. 1:10). How do we become one as Jesus is one with the Father? How do we *“speak the same thing”* and *“be of the same mind in the same judgment?”* By following the example that Jesus left for us:

- By speaking only that for which we have been given authority by the Father (John 12:49). Therefore Peter commanded us in 1 Peter 4:11, *“If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.”* Paul, in showing the Corinthians how to *“speak the same things,”* also wrote, *“...that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other”* (1 Corinthians 4:6). Therefore if we want to have the unity that Jesus has with the Father, then we must learn to only speak those things which have give to us by the Father in the scriptures.
- By being obedient, just as Jesus was, to everything that God commanded (Hebrews 5:8-9; John 8:28). The only way we are able to be unified in the body is if we are obedient to the word of God; and not only to some of it, but all of it. Therefore we read in Hebrews 5:9, *“He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”* Therefore, in this we are able to *“walk just as He walked”* (1 John 2:6).

- By doing nothing of ourselves, just as Jesus did nothing of Himself, but only that which was of the Father (John 5:30). This is where Many people get caught up today. Men often want to do things that seem good to them, but forget (or don't want to) to see if God gave them authority for it. If we are to be in complete agreement with God then we must only do what He says we can do. Therefore it is written, *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him"* (Colossians 3:17). Paul also wrote, *"If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord"* (1 Corinthians 14:37). Jesus did not come to make Himself feel good by coming up with new and improved ways of serving God, neither did He look for ways to be creative in How He taught the will of God. He only did that which God commanded Him. His goal was to simply do the will of the Father. So we must also do if we are to be one with each other and with the Father and the Son (2 John 9).
- By always doing those things that please the Father (John 8:29). Therefore we are commanded, *"...and do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Romans 12:2). *"For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth, finding out what is acceptable to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:9-10). *"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is"* (Ephesians 5:17). *"Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever"* (Hebrews 13:20-21).
- By these things Jesus was able to say that He was in the Father and that the Father was also in Him. He was doing the will of the Father. Jesus was in Paul because he too was doing the will of Jesus (compare John 17:23; Galatians 2:20). We are capable of doing the same thing through the covenant that Jesus established on the cross. Let us not be deceived. Men are fully capable and are commanded to be one with one another in doctrine, in speech and in faith, just as Jesus and the Father are one.

Conclusion

We are able to see through these things that it is possible and that it is expected of God's people to speak the same things and walk by the same judgments, thereby being unified. Can we have unity in the church today the same way that God and Jesus are unified? Yes, Yes, and again, Yes! But it requires humility, submission, and a desire to please God and not our own vain imaginations. Jesus exemplified all of these characteristics, and so must we.