

## UNITY IN THE CHURCH

By Fred L. Orcutt, Jr.

### Relevant Scriptures

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! *Psalm 133:1 (NIV)*

Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one. *John 17:11B (NIV)*

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one — I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. *John 17:20-23 (NIV)*

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. *Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)*

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. *Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)*

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. *Colossians 3:14 (NIV)*

Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. . . Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand. *Romans 14:1 & 4 (NIV)*

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A friend asked me to write an article about congregational unity in the church. Hence, here we go!

Congregations that are in unity experience goodness and pleasantness.

Unity in the church is important to Jesus. He asked the Father in John 17 to make us one as He and the Father are one. One reason for this, He said, is that the world may know that God sent Jesus and that He loved the church in the same way He loved Jesus.

In order for unity to exist in a congregation, that unity *must* be centered in Jesus Himself and in His Word. You can have opinions about something and so can I. You may be wrong. I may be wrong. Both of us may be wrong! If our opinions do not square with God's will as revealed in the *Bible*, we are wrong and need to bring our beliefs into accord with what God has said. When God's Word is clear, we have no business behaving contrary to it. When God's Word doesn't

specifically cover a particular situation, He has given us principles in His Word that can enable us to resolve conflicts properly.

In all of this, love plays a big part! How many times in the *Bible* are we admonished to deal with each other in love – with understanding and with a desire to maintain unity?

Did you know there are times when it is OK for us to hold differing opinions? These are situations where the *Bible* doesn't speak to the issues either directly or by principle. Paul told us to accept each other in these matters. They are inconsequential as far as our faith is concerned. What you believe about them will not affect your salvation or anyone else's. Paul used the example of meat sacrificed to idols. The *Bible* makes clear that we are not to be judges of such matters. It is God's business.

How do we apply all this in our congregations?

First, decide what type of situation you are dealing with and whether it is worth pursuing. Many issues are best just left alone. If not, is the issue doctrinal, is it behavioral, or is it a matter of some gross or public sin? The answer to this question will determine how you should proceed.

If the issue is doctrinal, search the scriptures to determine how God sees it. He may correct you or He may confirm that you are correct in your understanding. Also, pray much about the issue and allow God to give you His perspective. Let me give you an example. I do not believe that the rapture of the church will take place at the beginning of the tribulation. I expressed this view in our *Bible* study group one week. The Chairman of Deacons was the class teacher and believed it did. Though he never discussed this with me, he blocked my ability to become a teacher in that church. I prayed about this and decided this was not worth making an issue of.

If the issue still gives you heartburn, go the person involved *in humility* and express your concern. Do so with a genuine willingness to listen to their point of view. That may well resolve the issue in a way that will maintain cordial relations. If not, seek guidance from your pastor or other trusted spiritual leader. Do NOT go around blabbing about the situation! Your congregation likely has procedures for resolving disputes. Follow your pastor's guidance in pursuing them.

If the situation is one of behavior or of gross or public sin, Matthew 18:15-19 provides a clear procedure for dealing with it. Follow that direction, but do so with much prayer and mercy. Also, realize that God did not intend for you to go from Step 1 to Step 3 in a short period of time. You need time to pray. The congregation needs time to pray. All those involved need time to allow God to work. Be patient.

In all these situations, be patient, be kind, be merciful and involve as few people as possible. Again, Do NOT go around blabbing about the situation!

Bear in mind that the *Bible* admonishes us in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 14 that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way." It is extremely important to follow the guidance of your pastor and the congregation's procedures. This will foster resolution of the situation without trauma to God's people or destroying the congregation's reputation in the community.

If the situation is not resolved in a way you can accept, you have two choices. You can stay and be a cooperating member of the congregation or you can leave the congregation *quietly and without rancor* and find a congregation where you can be comfortable. You must not continue to harp on the issue and cause division in the congregation! That would be damaging to God's people.

A word about disagreeing with your congregation's pastor. Remember that God put your pastor into the leadership of your congregation. It has always amazed me that congregations spend much time praying for God's man when they need a pastor. When He gives them one, they praise Him for this man He has given them, but when this God-given pastor begins to preach or lead in a way we don't like, we think it is OK to pursue dismissing him or correcting(?) him. How foolish! God gives us His man and we think we are wise enough to direct him or remove him! What arrogance! Except for gross or public sin, **KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF GOD'S MAN!** God is well able to correct or remove him if needs be.