

The Unity of All Christians

The aim of this article

In the following treatise you can learn why we believe and how we understand that the unity Jesus was praying for can be realized in the Church. What does the unity of Christians consist in?—Christians have unity not only in teaching but also in the attitude and life-questions.

The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (*John 17:22-23*)

This prayer of Jesus, the last words he uttered in the midst of his disciples, shows us how important the unity among his disciples was for Jesus. The deep, indivisible unity that Jesus had and has with his Father is the standard as well as the source of the unity among his disciples. The unity among Christians is the work of the triune God. His indivisible nature thus becomes visible in the fellowship of his children.

In his prayer, Jesus asks the Father that the unity among the disciples may be realised (*John 17:11.17-24*) also with those who will listen to their word. They are the Christians of every era (*John 17:20-21*). This perfect example shows that the depth of the unity among the disciples has no limit, for the example is the relationship between the Father and the Son. **In the same way as the Father is one with the Son and the Son is one with the Father**, and there is nothing that could separate them, **the disciples can be also one through the Son.**

This unity exists in reality as a sign for the world and for the people who seek the truth (*John 17:21c,23b*), and is not an unreachable ideal.

Jesus was aware of the fact that he prayed for sinful people. However, **through the act of salvation** the opportunity for **real unity with each other arose** for those who seek the deepest possible unity with the Father. The community with the living God forms the unity and the bonds of love by Christ and the Spirit. Unconditional trust, unlimited love and obedience, being ready for any sacrifice; these describe the relationship of the Son to the Father. **This is the way for any follower of Christ in every time.** In the repentance, God gives wish for giving all our life into His hands, yielding the leading to him and identifying with the will of the Father. According to the Bible to be one with Christ means also to be one with other Christians. (*Acts 2:37-38*)

So those who received his word were baptized.... (*Acts 2:41*)

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple.... (*Acts 2:46a, NASB*)

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul.... (*Acts 4:32a*)

Because these people seek the fellowship with God and other Christians, God can lead them together, even if they come from different backgrounds. **God wants every man to repent** and He has done and still does everything to enable that, but He knows that it must be the personal decision of His free-willed creatures.

What Does the Unity Among Christians Consist of?

Teaching

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.... (*Acts 2:42, NASB*)

...they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily.... (*Acts 17:11b*)

And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (*Acts 19:8-10*)

If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. (*1 Timothy 4:6*)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (*2 Timothy 3:14-17*)

These passages illustrate the importance of getting to know the **apostolic teaching**, which stems from Christ. **The Holy Spirit leads every Christian, and anyone who seeks God to this teaching.**

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (*John 20:29*)

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (*John 16:13*)

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. (*John 14:16-17*)

He is the one who enables the saved believers to **reach unity** in teaching, understanding and interpretation of the Word, for it is their desire to "**worship the Father in spirit and truth**". (John 4:23-24 and Philippians 2:1-2)

It contradicts God's word to think that **in essential questions** (e.g. the salvation through Christ, predestination, papal primacy, infallibility of the pope, etc.) God's Spirit would lead open-hearted people who love the truth to different conclusions. (Ephesians 4:1-6) God wants every Christian to...

...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to

mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (*Ephesians 4:13-14*)

Diverging from the right teaching presented a real danger right from the beginning. Therefore Jesus and the apostles warned the Christians to be watchful and able to **distinguish right from false teachings**. (*1 Corinthians 2:12-15*)

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. (*Titus 2:1*)

O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge" [1]. (*1 Timothy 6:20*)

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life.... (*2 Timothy 3:10a*)

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.... (*1 Timothy 6:3-4a*)

...having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. (*2 Timothy 3:5*)

The recognition of the significance of **unity** can be found both **in the Old Testament and among the ecclesiastical writings of the first centuries**.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore. (*Psalms 133*)

Hear now then concerning the stones that are in the building. The square and white stones which agree exactly in their joints, are the apostles, and bishops, and doctors, and ministers, who through the mercy of God have come in, and governed, and taught and ministered holily and modestly to the elect of God, both they that have fallen asleep, and which yet remain; and have always agreed with them, and have had peace within themselves, and have heard each other. For which cause their joints exactly meet together in the building of the tower. (The Shepherd of Hermas—III. Vision 51-53)

The Attitude, Life-Questions

...complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. (*Philippians 2:2*)

Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. (*Philippians 3:17-18*)

I urge you, then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and

faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church. *(1 Corinthians 4:16-17)*

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. *(Ephesians 4:1-6)*

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. *(Romans 15:5-6)*

That **does not mean uniformity**, it rather expresses that each of the brothers endeavour to build up the community, the body of Christ according to his own gifts and abilities. (1 Corinthians 12:4,13 and Ephesians 4:16) Each of the members is equally important. (1 Corinthians 12:14-27)

The Bible Does Not Distinguish Between Theory and Practice

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.... *(2 Timothy 3:10)*

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.... *(Ephesians 5:1-2a)*

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. *(John 13:35)*

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Footnotes

1. The Greek word used here for knowledge is gnosis which is also the name of a false doctrine which Paul alludes to here.

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