

# Hurst Green Evangelical Church

27<sup>th</sup> Jan 2019

Eze 36:22-38

## Christian Unity

### Introduction

So as we come to the end of the week of prayer for Christian unity I thought perhaps I should talk on Christian unity. Surprisingly it is a difficult subject because it can mean all things to all men or it can mean something specific and men tend to interpret it to suit themselves.

Before I start I want to clear one item off the table. You may meet people who regard Christian unity as “you must believe what I believe and do things the way that I do them”. This actually is the exact opposite of unity – as Margaret said last week Unity is not the same as uniformity.

We can be in unity with each other and do things in different ways and even believe different things – but only in the details.

- How you do baptism – does it really matter. Is it making a difference in heaven? That is a good question to ask about any of these details – is it making a difference in heaven!
- What do you believe happens to the bread and wine in communion. Some believe it literally becomes the body and blood, others that it has some special powers, and still others that it only represents. Scripture is silent on this detail and so does it matter.
- Forgiveness of sins. Some hold that only certain people can forgive sins and others that we can forgive one another.

All these are details and depend on the interpretation of scripture and in some cases Jesus’ recorded words.

It is worth remembering

### **Romans 14:13-15 (ANIV)**

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling-block or obstacle in your brother's way. <sup>14</sup> As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean. <sup>15</sup> If your brother is distressed because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love. Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.*

If it matters scripture would be far clearer on these matters so that we could not misinterpret it.

So unity is not uniformity – remember that one.

### Christian Unity

Now as to Christian unity firstly remember that unity by itself can be good and bad.

Herod and Pilate and the ruling classes were united in their desire to be rid of Jesus – that was not a good unity.

The condemnation of people to a life of slavery, while some groups accept it, is not a good unity. Don't forget the bible was used to justify slavery because the bible has slaves in it – that does not mean that it is right. The important thing is the gospel is for all men but we are also called to love justice and the fight against slavery is one way every one of us can be involved in justice.

So that leaves us with an even knottier problem. All these issues and variations could cause us to throw our hands up and give up on the concept.

That is also not the answer – we cannot escape from the need for unity.

***Ephesians 4:4-6 (ANIV)***

<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

But we must also remember that not all who claim to be Christians are Christians.

***Matthew 7:21-23 (ANIV)***

<sup>21</sup> *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"*

So the emphasis is on doing the Father's will and even those who perform what we would see as great miracles can be doing it in a different power and many of what have seemed to be great ministries have fallen because they were not based on the Father's will and power.

It seems harsh but shows how diligent we must be in this matter of unity.

And it is not simply a matter of professing God. Do you remember the servant girl in Acts 16

***Acts 16:17 (ANIV)***

<sup>17</sup> *This girl followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved."*

She was telling the truth but it was coming from a different power because she was into divination and sorcery. In the end Paul sorted it out

***Acts 16:18 (ANIV)***

<sup>18</sup> *~~She kept this up for many days.~~ Finally Paul became so troubled that he turned round and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

Note that he addressed the spirit not the girl for it was the spirit that was directing and controlling her.

So given all that how do we decide who we can and cannot be in unity with?

In this area we have an active Churches together and yet we can find some who find fault with that. We regards it as a blessing but only because it consists of Churches that follow

biblical teaching. If it let certain other groups that call themselves churches into membership then we would have to consider our position.

So how do we go about this unity thing?

I have already given you one measure in that it is not uniformity and it also is not conformity. You must conform to this and that before you can belong. But I offer that with a proviso – there are certain things you must conform to if it is to be Christian unity.

So let me give you some hints on how to decide who to be in unity with. And these apply worldwide so govern things like our tithe fund. When thanking God for the collection each week I commit it for God's work here and throughout the world. Currently that is in Zimbabwe through Mavis and Zambia – did you look up Sachibondu when I encouraged you to last October?

Even as a small church we have influence internationally!!

Actually we need to think about why we call ourselves small. We have become as big as many other churches and we are a growing Church – perhaps people are not being added to us **daily** (see Acts 2) but people are coming to us because God is working in this place through you! Perhaps I need to change my language?

So what do we need to look for to be in unity?

Put to one side the obvious big issues which we should all know about already:

- Some churches do not believe in the Holy Spirit despite it being in the bible.
- Some churches do not acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God
- In some churches icons etc have become more important than God – they have become their God. I personally do not dismiss whole denominations because of this but it is one to watch out for. Some of you may remember Panay who came here some years ago. He came because he had found his Church was worshipping icons.

Those big things are easy but we suffer from a lack of unity.

Let me give you some ideas to look for and this applies to individuals as well as Churches.

You may have some unity with someone who would fail these criteria and that is not wrong but it is not Christian Unity.

### **Source**

Firstly you need to look at the source of the unity. I have already quoted Eph 4

***Ephesians 4:2-3 (ANIV)***

<sup>2</sup> *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.* <sup>3</sup>  
*Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

The Holy Spirit is the source of the unity we seek and it is found where people are at peace with one another.

You are going to find it difficult to have unity with someone who is disrupting the peace. Perhaps arguing all the time, seeking to have their own way, not serving the fellowship.

Such people will not be contributing to the body of Christ. We are one body but many parts but we have in common that Jesus is our head – he directs us through the Holy Spirit that he has given us.

Remember part of the great commission is

**Acts 1:8 (ANIV)**

<sup>8</sup> *But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

We all know the last half of that verse but often miss out that first bit.

The Holy Spirit is on us and it is in his power we operate and all are called to this.

**1 Corinthians 12:13 (ANIV)**

<sup>13</sup> *For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Anyone can be part of this unity – we might not like them or appreciate their life style and life choices but if they follow Jesus they are part of this unity. They are not practising uniformity but they can practice unity!

## Views

Christian unity is unity in the truth but it is also so much more than that. If your passion is about the homeless sleeping on our streets you will find it difficult to have unity with someone whose passion is for the Inuit people until you realise that you are both following Christ command to take the gospel to the people. Then you can share a passion for mission.

**Ephesians 4:13 (ANIV)**

<sup>13</sup> *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.*

That is Paul telling us to build the body of Christ and his measure is in the faith and knowledge of Christ,

Faith is where we look to for our salvation and our power to operate here on earth.

Knowledge of Christ is what we all should be seeking through our study of the bible and seeking Gods will for us individually and collectively.

Paul emphasises this in many places.

**Philippians 2:1-3 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,* <sup>2</sup> *then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.* <sup>3</sup> *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.*

He tells us to be like minded – our views are the same.

To have the same love – this comes from God and all Christians should be showing the same love for we are commanded to love one another. It is not a choice and we do not choose who we will love – we are commanded by our God. Important stuff!!

Having one spirit – that spirit that was given to each of us when we accepted our salvation.

And so we can live in harmony with each other.

### **Affections**

The unifying love form God requires – not asks or suggests but requires us to love

#### ***Galatians 6:9-10 (ANIV)***

*<sup>9</sup> Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup> Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*

To love all people but especially to love the body of believer

### **Aims**

And we should have the same aims. As with the example I just used the people groups or areas may be different but we have the same aims:

- To witness Christ to the world
- To acknowledge and show the glory of God

Neither of those is that difficult – remember the church in acts 2 enjoyed the favour of all people because of the way they lived. Hard time were coming but they witnessed Christ to the world in the way that they lived.

And the glory of God – it is in all of his creation; it is all around us. We need to acknowledge it in all we are for he has opened the gates of heaven and let us come in.

### **What should we do?**

This unity is not achieved and shown by us sitting on our backsides wondering what is going on. What does that unity call on us to do in our lives.

Firstly to be filled with the spirit – this is not a popular one because there is an element of losing control. But we must seek to be led by the spirit so that the fruit of the spirit in Galatians form a basic part of our lives.

We need to share by any means we can what we see of Christ. Do our homes reflect our beliefs? Do we show our belief in our lives? Do those around us know us as Christians because we stand out as the Church in Acts stood out? Do we share what we believe that God has done for us – no-one can deny our experience. They may choose not to attribute it to God but we choose to and we choose to say so.

We had that quote from Galatians earlier. Does our live reflect our love for our fellow believers. It is something this Church is known for internally but we need to show our love

for the other Churches in our area and for believers worldwide. We may not be able to go to them but we can send money and most importantly our prayers.

That is serving other Christians as we see the Churches in the bible serving each other as they had the resources. It was not a question of a few coppers in the bottom of the bag but a sacrificial giving to help others from our plenty.

### **Ambiguities**

This still leaves some ambiguities and I know I have not given you a simply three step plan to Unity. We have to take views on various aspects and decide where we should be in unity. We have our guidance in the bible and in the Holy Spirit and so we can act in unity and show that unity to the outside world as the body of Christ operates together.