

Unity - What will it Take...?

This entire item is taken from the "PeaceMakers" newsletter of August 1999, the entire issue of which was about the disunity that there is within the church.

We recently heard the story of two brothers in the Lord. Both love Jesus and are filled with the Spirit. Both hear from the Lord and see visions freely. Both are in leadership in the groups they are part of.

They were praying together regularly over several weeks and experiencing great blessing as the Holy Spirit moved during their prayer times. Both sensed that the Lord wanted to do something significant through them in their community and they understood that they were more usable together than individually.

Then, however, they ran into trouble. Control became an issue. One brother regarded himself as more experienced and wanted to be the leader. The other brother refused to be dominated. Fellowship broke down and the Lord's plans were curtailed.

This is a true story. With sadness, we reflect on the fact that this is a scenario that is repeated again and again throughout the Body of Christ in this country. It is encouraging that two brothers - from different traditions - got together to pray and that they started to see a move of the Spirit. However, it is upsetting that it broke down so quickly. Most of us never even get that far - our pride stops the purpose of God before it is given expression in any way.

What's Important?

It's all got to do with priorities. We all have an agenda to pursue and 'turf' to protect. Most of us belong to (or even lead) an organisation that has to be maintained and - usually - enlarged. For most of us, being united with those in other groups (even those we regard as 'Christian') has seldom been taught or sought. Unity in the Body has always been in the 'too hard' basket and loving our brothers and sisters has been difficult enough within our own fellowship, let alone outside it.

Being correct (or standing up for the truth) is often an important priority. This has often provided the basis (or rationale) for being separate from other Christians. 'We have the Truth' or 'We are the ones moving in the Spirit' has usually given us the warm fuzzies needed to make sure that we don't bother being rightly related to the brothers and sisters outside of our own group. After all, it's easy to point out their errors (of theology or practice or both); in fact it's fairly likely that they're so wrong that if they make it into Heaven at all, it'll be by only a hair's breadth. The more we think about it, the more convinced we become that it's very unlikely that they were ever saved in the first place.

This thinking has usually taken us to the place where the only possible way to interact (or even -dare we suggest it - develop an open, transparent and trusting relationship) with those in other groups is to insist that it takes place on our terms. This usually means that 'we have an open attitude to other Christians - if they want to come to our meetings, they are welcome'. Of course, we would never say it aloud that we are closed to the possibility of going to play in their yard. We would simply indicate that we are too busy with existing

commitments to include any more meetings. (This is probably true for most of us, but then this takes us back to priorities.)

Of course, we are open to the possibility that there could be a worthwhile activity run on 'neutral ground'. But we would have our guard up and our heresy meter on and tuned in. At the first sign of suspect beliefs or goings on (meaning anything that doesn't line up with our own understanding) we're outta there. Can't be seen hanging out with someone who's wrong. Or worse, the other guys might be right and it's usually a bit much to have to admit that or even acknowledge the possibility.

Are We flexible Enough?

More than likely, the Lord has broad enough shoulders to cope with more than one perspective on many of the issues that divide us. Have we? More specifically, do we have the maturity to relate to those with whom we were formerly estranged? Can we rearrange our priorities to line them up with Jesus?

We don't need to quote the Scriptures. We all know them.

The bottom line is, when are we going to really love one another? When are we going to stop judging one another? When are we really going to live in unity with our brothers and sisters? When are we going to humble ourselves sufficiently to get our relationships right? When are we going to allow the Holy Spirit to transcend the denominational barriers that are in the way of the Kingdom of God?

Jesus made it very clear how the world will know Him. When are we going to lay down our own agendas and obey?

Back to our brothers referred to at the beginning. We trust that their differences can be resolved and that they can get back on track in giving expression to the unity of the Body of Christ and the fulfilment of what the Holy Spirit wants us to do. May it be the same where you live..

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