

Endeavoring to Keep Unity

by Brian Broderick



I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. Ephesians 4:1-6

Here Paul calls us to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit. Christian unity cannot be manufactured but is the work of the Holy Spirit uniting Christians around the person of Jesus Christ. The ecumenical movement is an attempt to bring about Christian unity by excluding dogmatic concepts. That's the problem with it. Doctrines like the deity of Christ, the nature of salvation, the virgin birth, the atonement and bodily resurrection of Christ, and the inerrancy of Scripture are not emphasized or held tightly because these issues tend to be divisive. But we must hold on to essential doctrines. If we let them go, then we basically let go of the Christian faith. So, if a person or denomination rejects the essentials of the faith, then I must separate myself from that person or group. But it's not a real division within the Body of Christ because those who reject the essentials are not really members of Christ's Body.

Quite often, however, we're at enmity with one another because we disagree over things that don't really matter in the big picture. This is where I think Paul is saying we are to endeavor "to keep the unity of the Spirit." It's not an easy thing to do. It takes great effort because our natural tendency is to say, "I'm right, and you're wrong; therefore, I don't want anything to do with you."

This is not to say that these issues aren't important, because they are. We can disagree passionately about them. But in the end we have to disagree agreeably, continuing to love one another and to recognize

one another's legitimate place in the Body of Christ.

Christians divide over many non-essential issues like modes of baptism, eschatology, church government, and ministry models. For example, seeker-sensitive churches try to attract the un-churched by not doing or saying anything that might offend people. I disagree with this ministry model, but I've got to walk in love, recognizing that God works even in less-than-ideal conditions and in ministries that aren't modeled upon the Scripture as I think they ought to be.

We are called to walk in such a way that even when we disagree, the power and love of Christ is greater than our disagreements.

Another example relates to the person, work, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. We believe in the baptism with the Holy Spirit subsequent to salvation. But many good Christians believe that the minute you're saved, you get everything. And both camps have a tendency to dismiss each other. One of my favorite Bible teachers, Dr. J. Vernon McGee, believed that the gifts of the Spirit ended with the apostolic age. Yet, who could deny that J. Vernon McGee was filled with the Holy Spirit?

The Calvinist/Arminian dispute is another issue that too often divides us. Many unkind

words have been spoken and many ungodly attitudes excused under the pretense of "defending the faith."

I personally have to strive to keep the unity of the Spirit when it comes to the topic of creation versus evolution because when I hear Christians giving credibility to evolutionary ideas, those are fighting words to me. And yet, as important as this issue is, it doesn't determine a person's salvation.

One of the most recent examples of Christians squabbling over non-essentials centers around the movie, *The Passion of the Christ*.

Some Evangelical leaders have spoken out against it because of Mel Gibson's Roman Catholicism. Some have been upset that the movie contains unscriptural material. Others have been offended that Roman Catholic ideas have been interjected into the story line. Well, all I can say is this: after 30 years of Jesus being

intentionally kept out of the public's view by our cultural leaders, through a Catholic producer and a Catholic actor, He's suddenly back in the spotlight, crucified and risen again! I think that is something we all ought to be united over!

Let's not give the world another chance to dismiss our message over petty squabbling. We need to demonstrate that we're not against each other and that we can hold different views and still recognize the validity of one another's experience with Christ. We are called to walk in such a way that even when we disagree, the power and love of Christ is greater than our disagreements. ✠