

A Plea for Unity of the Spirit

During the weeks immediately following a contested election, we typically hear the plea for unity from elected officials. Our country is deeply divided by factions, each with a different perspective. We certainly need unity. Unity is defined as “the state of being united or joined as a whole.” Another definition of unity is “to be in harmony.” Unity involves respecting others and working together for the greater good.



We live in a country that celebrates free will. Our relationship with God is based on free will, as well. God gave us free will so that we would consciously make decisions. Paramount is deciding whether or not we will follow Him, rather than blindly following but not believing. Blind obedience is not a free-will decision because it doesn't require us to evaluate and seek God's guidance and His will. Following Him is a commitment.

Our decision to follow God is based on love. The gospel of John states, “All people will know that you are my followers if you love each other (John 13:35). In Ephesians, Paul writes we should “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3). Loving others and seeking peace are attitudes. It is about acceptance of others, even with those who think differently than us. Unity is based on our attitude, not our convictions.

Max Lucado said we don't need to “build” unity. Many politicians get it wrong. Some politicians say they want to *build* unity, while the Bible says we need to “keep” unity. There is a big difference. Building unity is an attempt to sway people to our ideas. Keeping unity is recognizing the worth of all people and doing what is right in God's eyes. In God's view, there is but “one flock and one shepherd” (see John 10:16). Lucado said, “unity does not need to be created; it simply needs to be protected.”

Lucado reminds us that we don't need to compromise our convictions or abandon the truths we cherish but “look long and hard at the attitudes we carry.” God wants us to be unified in our love and discipleship. “For we were all baptized by one Spirit to form one body--whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.” ... But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:13). “Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.” (Philippians 2:2). We do this for the glory of God, not our own agenda.

So, how do we seek to accomplish this? Here are some suggestions that seek to do God's will (from John Piper, author of Desiring God):

- (1) Seek to be led by the Spirit and the Fruits of the Spirit;
- (2) Strive to know and share God's truth;
- (3) Love people across all boundaries;
- (4) Serve people across all boundaries.

Let us seek to exhibit both “uncompromised principles” and “observable love” in how we live our life. Then the unity of the Spirit will show through us. (quote from John Piper). *May the Lord lead your hearts into God's love and Christ's patience (2 Thessalonians 3:5).* By serving God's purpose, we will make the right choices and be unified with others seeking to do the same.

Question: Name some areas you need to improve your attitude to keep unity. How do you decide the basis of the choices you make?

Prayer: Dear Lord. We all have different opinions of what needs to be done and what is right and wrong. Let us base our choices on Your will and our attitude on how we can work in harmony and protect unity. Amen.