

Christian Unity

Ángel Manuel Rodríguez

Could you address the question of unity in the church? I am saddened by the many tensions I see in the church.

I understand your concern. But keep in mind that both wheat and weeds are present in the church, and it's important to seek unity in spite of the tensions. The unity of the church is rooted deeply in the unity of God Himself, whose creation is functionally and structurally one. As Creator, He was the center around which everything found its reason for being. Therefore, all of creation reflected to some extent God's oneness. Sin damaged creation by decentralizing it. Left without a center, humans found one in their own selves with devastating results.

Let's look at this phenomenon, and at Christ's work of restoring wholeness to the human race and to the cosmos.

1. Human Solidarity in Sin: Humanity's rejection of God constituted them into a massive expression of oneness in sin, one in rebellion against God (Rom. 1:18-3:18), in sin (Rom. 5:12), and in death (verses 17, 21). They share common experiences, attitudes, and a common destination. Obviously this is not true unity. In fact, alienated from each other, they exist in a frantic search for self-realization and self-preservation. Each person has become his or her own center, in tension and conflict with everyone else (Gal. 5:19-21). They come together for particular purposes expecting some personal gain; but open conflict develops when that expectation fails. This fragmentation is the natural condition of the human heart. The ego is not strong enough to hold us together. We look at ourselves and find tensions, unresolved issues, and a frustrating desire to do what is good (Gal. 5:16, 17; Rom. 8:6-8). The ego exists in conflict with itself, leaving us unable to unify our own existence.

2. Oneness in Christ: The oneness of God was manifested in the person of His Son: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30, NIV). Through the incarnation Jesus reunited humans to God, creating a center around which repentant sinners become one in Him, in the Father (John 17:21), in the Spirit (Eph. 4:4), and with each other (1 Peter 3:8, 9). Christ provided a unifying center in His own person and work. It is His plan to restore wholeness to the universe by reconciling everything to Himself (Col. 1:20). He is already uniting repentant sinners to Himself in the church, which is His body, one undivided organism (Eph. 2:12-16). They join, through baptism, a new humanity that is not fragmented but exists in oneness with Him, their true center. The church is the visible expression of the effectiveness of Christ's work of reconciliation on earth. Its unity reveals that the Son reconciles us to the Father (John 17:21, 23). Without the unity of the church the reconciling work of Christ would lack credibility in the world. It is only in Him and through Him that we can be, and remain, one.

3. Visibility of the Oneness in Christ: The church's oneness is, at the same time, a present reality and a task to be accomplished in the power of the Spirit. Our union in Christ expresses itself and is nurtured within the church through our common *message*, common *mission*, common *lifestyle*, and our *organized* global community of believers. We have "one faith" that embodies the message of salvation in Christ at the close of the cosmic conflict, and it has to be protected (Eph. 4:5; Rev. 14:6-8; 2 Tim. 1:13, 14). This *message* is framed within the work of Christ in the cosmic conflict, providing us with a sound, biblical worldview (Rev. 12). We have a common *mission* that will prepare the world for the coming of our Lord (Rev. 10:11; 14:6-12). Our unity in Christ manifests itself in the way we live the Christian life (Eph. 4:1-3). Since Christ is the center of our lives we align ourselves with the heavenly *lifestyle*. Our unity is visible

in the *organized* structure of the church, which facilitates the mission of the global church (1 Cor. 12:12-25).

These things not only make visible our unity in Christ, but directly contribute to holding us together as one people; the people of God.