

*In search of...*

# Truth & Right

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## Unity in Diversity

Unity in diversity. Yes, there is such a thing. The Lord Jesus wants his disciples to be united, even at times when there seems to be tremendous differences between them. Both Jesus and his apostles decry division (John 17:20-23; Eph. 4:1-3).

Before we discuss this, however, let it be acknowledged that the denominational world generally has made up its own, ecumenical kind of "unity in diversity." To briefly summarize, its idea is to unite "believers" of widely divergent beliefs by encouraging them to simply "agree to disagree." To illustrate, the person who believes that baptism is immersion in water is encouraged to have fellowship with the one who believes that sprinkling will do just as well. But this is a pseudo-fellowship,

thinking that people can share in something they don't actually share. It turns a blind eye to the source of division. Or to put it another way, it is not the unity the Bible teaches. Paul pleaded ***"that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment"*** (1 Cor. 1:10). Christianity only acknowledges ***"one baptism"*** (Eph. 4:5); it also acknowledges only ***"one body"*** (Eph. 4:4; cf. Eph. 1:22-23) and only ***"one faith"*** (Eph. 4:5), thus rendering the multiple bodies/churches and faiths of denominationalism to be unscriptural and thus condemned.

There are some differences, however, among believers in which we can – no, must – unite. First, there

must be unity among believers of diverse nationalities, social standings and genders (Gal. 3:26-28). No matter who we are – Asian or Caucasian...black or white...employer or employee...rich or poor...man or woman – those who have ***“put on Christ”*** in baptism stand on equal ground before God. Consequently, they need to be viewed as standing on equal ground before each other, worthy of being embraced as brothers or sisters, regardless of skin color or what “side of the tracks” they come from. Only the cross of Christ could bring this about (Eph. 2:14-16; Philemon 15-16).

Secondly, there must also be unity among believers with diverse skills and abilities. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth about the miraculous spiritual gifts they possessed, ***“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit”*** (1 Cor. 12:4). The Corinthians should have been united in their use of their gifts unto the edification of the church, but sadly, they were divided. Paul implied that some who had one type of gift were “looking down their noses” at those who didn’t. (An example of this is 1 Corinthians 12:21’s ***“And the eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you.’”***) He also implied that others, because they didn’t have a certain gift, were jealous and

consequently weren’t using the gift they did have. (See verse 15’s ***“If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body.”***) Corinth’s problems are still with local churches today, even though we do not possess miraculous spiritual gifts like they did (1 Cor. 13:8-10; cf. James 1:25; Rom. 12:2). Those today who have a particular talent are at times proud and boastful, while those who consider themselves one-talent people are indifferent to their potential. Until we cease focusing (in a negative way) on our diverse abilities and start concentrating on the unifying purpose for our having them (to build up the body), we aren’t going to be unified as we ought, and we certainly aren’t going to be productive. We must realize that each of us is important, and put each other before ourselves (Phil. 2:3-4).

Finally, there must be unity among believers with diverse idiosyncrasies. In Romans 14 Paul called for unity among brethren who consciences differed. Some could, with a clean conscience, eat certain meats. Some could not. But Paul told them to ***“receive”*** one another, to not ***“despise”*** one another, and to not ***“judge one another”*** (Rom. 14:1, 3, 14). Now, Paul wasn’t calling for the “unity in diversity” described in our introductory second

paragraph. He wasn't calling for believers to accept and **"receive"** those who came with some extra or anti-biblical teaching or practice (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9-13; 2 John 9-11). Rather, Paul dealt with disciples with diverse convictions concerning which, no matter which position a disciple took on the issue, did not involve a person in sin (Rom. 14:3-4). Today, brethren have varying conscientious scruples, many times the result of how they were raised by their parents, culture, religion, etc. The one who is **"strong,"** whose conscience will allow him to exercise what he knows to be a freedom in Christ because of his stronger knowledge of God's Will and spiritual maturity, is not to run roughshod over his brother whose conscience will not allow him. The brother who is **"weak"** in knowledge and spiritual maturity is not to condemn the strong, but is required to **"grow in all things"** (Eph. 4:15). Friends, that's biblical unity in diversity.

The body of Christ is a diverse group – believers of different races, genders, socio-economic classes, abilities, and scruples. But the Lord desires for us to do all we can to work for unity. ***"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!"*** (Ps. 133:1)

Jon Mitchell

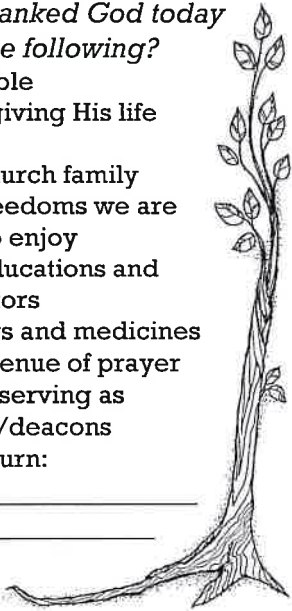
**DEAR GOD,  
I WANNA TAKE A  
MINUTE, NOT TO ASK  
FOR ANYTHING FROM  
YOU, BUT SIMPLY TO  
SAY THANK YOU,  
FOR ALL I HAVE.**

*Have you thanked God today  
for any of the following?*

- The Bible
- Jesus giving His life for us
- Our church family
- The freedoms we are able to enjoy
- Our educations and educators
- Doctors and medicines
- The avenue of prayer
- Those serving as elders/deacons
- Your Turn:

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# Monthly Challenges

**DIRECTIONS:** *Each first Sunday of the month, we will have challenges that you should attempt to complete by the end of the month. If we all, as members, complete these challenges, our church will grow in spirit and in number.*

## **1) ENCOURAGE OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN CHRIST**

*1 Thess. 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing."*

A vital work that Christians are to be engaged in is strengthening each other. This month, our challenge will be to take the initiative and do something to build up someone in our congregation. Some of the ways we can all be encouragers are:

- a) read the prayer list in the bulletin and visit someone
- b) if you can't visit, give them a phone call
- c) or send them a card to brighten their day
- d) take time before and after services to get to know the brethren
- e) say something positive about their work in the church
- f) tell others about a Bible verse or passage that encourages you
- g) offer hospitality and help if you can, and do so with love

## **2) USING YOUR BIBLE IN THE WORLD**

Share the following verses with someone who does not attend this congregation at least twice this month:

*1 Thessalonians 4:3-8*

**3** "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; **4** that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, **5** not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; **6** that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. **7** For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. **8** Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.