

The Unity of the Spirit

Contributed by Jeff Trahan
Sunday, 06 September 2009

The night before Jesus was crucified, he prayed to his Father that all who come to believe in him "may become perfectly one" (John 17:23 ESV) or "be brought to complete unity" (NIV). That makes unity an important subject for those who want to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul pointed out that we must be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3 ESV). If we are to maintain this unity, we must understand how that is accomplished. The first thing Paul tells us is that unity begins with having the right attitude. "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV). There is more to being united than having the right attitude. Having said that, we must understand that all of the other provisions God has made for his people to be united will be ineffective without things like humility, gentleness, patience, love and a willingness to be united. Unity begins with having the right attitude. Paul went on to say that unity is based on certain facts. There are a number of things that all Christians have in common. Paul touched on some of these when he said, "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4-6 ESV). Much like Christians in the first century, Christians today often come from widely divergent backgrounds—racially, socially, and even religiously. Whether we like it or not, things like that affect people. These things, however, pale in comparison to what we have in common in Christ. "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13 ESV). What we have in common is greater than our differences. The final thing Paul indicated about the subject of unity is that it's accomplished only when Christians, based on the instruction they receive, grow up in Christ. Paul said that Christ "gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13 ESV). The role of each of these groups (i.e., apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds and teachers) pertains to giving instruction, and the purpose for which the instruction is given is so that all Christians might "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13 ESV). As we grow to be more like Jesus, we grow together. Now let me ask you: Do you have the right attitude? Do you value the things you have in common with all Christians? Are you striving to be more like Jesus? Are you "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3 ESV)?