

Unity

The Great Calling of the Church

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The Church has been called to bring unity to the world through the Gospel of Jesus Christ. While we do not always think of unity as being the call and mission of the Church, it is. Paul referred to the work of saints as a “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:17-21). Like ambassadors, we are to appeal to the world to be reconciled to God.

The goal of unity and the ministry of reconciliation is challenging. The Church must take unity more seriously among itself; otherwise, the credibility of the Church will be undermined. Unity is what gives the Church influence in persuading people to be reconciled with God. In this article, we will note how the call for unity was addressed in the New Testament.

People from the East and West

& the Table of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

A Roman soldier once came to Jesus on behalf of his servant. Roman soldiers approached Jews frequently, but never in such a humble fashion as this centurion approached Jesus. The soldier requested that Jesus heal his servant. Jesus agreed to go see the servant, but the soldier expressed great discomfort at the thought of Jesus coming to his house. He did not consider himself worthy to have Jesus come to his home. Instead, the soldier asked Jesus to speak words of healing.

Jesus was amazed by the faith of the Roman soldier. Jesus declared, “...Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith. I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion Jesus said, "Go; let it be done for you as you have believed." And the servant was healed at that very moment.” (Matt. 8:10-13).

Jesus was surprised at the faith of a Roman; a Gentile. Jesus had not found faith like this among His people, the Jews. Then, Jesus looked into the future and made a bold declaration. He said that many would come from the east and west and recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God.

This is an expression indicating Gentiles becoming part of the family of Abraham in the kingdom of God. But, this teaching of Jesus is about more than the Gentiles becoming part of the kingdom of God. This teaching is about unity. Jews and non-Jews would join one another at the same table by faith in Jesus. This is part of the bigger plan of God to produce a new creation.

The resurrected Lord commanded the apostles to make disciples from all the nations (Matt. 28:19). Just before ascending to His Father, Jesus told the apostles that they would be His

witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Later, the Bible closes with a vision in which people of all nations, tribes, and languages are united in praise of the Lamb of God (Rev. 5:9-10). God's vision for the human family is unity.

Unity & Us

Sin produced division and separation within the human family. When Adam and Eve sinned, their relationship with God changed drastically. They were expelled from the garden. Later, the people of the earth came together to exalt themselves above God. Their pride produced division. God confused the language of the people and they separated throughout the earth.

In response to sin, division, and separation, God provided a path to reconciliation and unity. The path is through faith in Jesus Christ. Regardless of our backgrounds, everyone can be united with God and one another through faith in Jesus.

The product of unity is significant. The Church becomes a multi-cultural community that transcends our backgrounds. Paul frequently makes this point in his letters. Where the world uses divisiveness to advance oppression, the Church attracts the world through unity. Notice the following passages.

Galatians 3:26-29: "For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

Ephesians 2:13-16: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Colossians 3:11: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."

By faith in the Gospel, people can come from the east and west and be seated at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Gospel is for everyone. Our backgrounds do not matter. All that matters is our faith. Paul closes his Galatian letter by saying that what matters most is that we are new creations by faith in Christ (Gal. 6:15).

Conclusion

As Christians, we need to be aware of God's overarching purpose of uniting us with Him. Our reconciliation to God is made possible through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a

seat for everyone at the table of God. Once seated at His table, we must maintain unity with those seated presently and invite everyone not yet seated to join.