



Dedicated to Helping You Succeed

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The Heart of the Matter: Unity

Through much observation, study, and practice, it becomes apparent that the key element of successful Christian living is having a heart for God. Such a discovery probably doesn't resonate as rocket science but as we assess how well that we represent the wholeness and love of God, and work at making disciples of all nations, the Christian community needs improvement.

This article will define why we lack success in adequately representing God and completing our assignment to make disciples of all nations and how simple it can be for us to turn this fact in the opposite direction.

The primary proof of our lack of positive effect in making disciples of all nations, as Jesus instructed within the great commission, is the disunity amongst believers. Having done some research on this subject, Jarvis Williams, an associate professor of New Testament Interpretations at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and author, writes that unity within the church best represents the love of God and the world fails to realize such love when disunity is present. He further writes that unity is not intended to represent people's agreement on every subject but rather a patient pursuit of harmony among His disciples for the good of the church by glorifying our Lord and the salvation of sinners. From this discovery, one could easily conclude that Christian unity best demonstrates the love of God and, from a worldly perspective, non-believers are attracted to large audiences of different people of varying denominations and ideologies living in harmony with a common God.

Eliminating disunity amongst believers was tops on Jesus' list, indicated in chapter 17 of John, as one of his concluding prayers prior to the cross was asking His Father to provide the same unity between believers as they experienced as Father to Son. Jesus even provided the reason for complete unity, which was to let the world know that God the Father sent His Son and that we may know God's love just as Jesus did. Such scripture goes well in validating the earlier stated conclusion stemming from Jarvis Williams' work.

From the very early beginnings of the Christian church there have been problems between believers, leading to ongoing divisions within the church. In fact, a study completed in 2014 by The Center for the Study of Global Christianity of the Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary found that there exists 45,000 denominations of protestant churches throughout the world, all resulting from people disagreeing in how best to worship the Lord. Author Rex Kovias, in his bestselling book *One Lord One Faith* defines that the leading cause for such disruption between churches, leading to so many different denominations, is that church leaders have allowed sectarian issues to become the governing authority defining right from wrong worship. Sectarian issues pertain to distinctive doctrinal subjects or leaders that groups of people adhere to or follow. When this occurs, people take on a very worldly perspective in judging the validity of such positions and polarize in their associations with one another. Hence, the world realizes a division between Christians and fall prey to one of Satan's favorite tools, which is to divide and conquer. A great historical example of this is in 1 Corinthians 3 when Paul sharply criticizes the people of Corinth, referring to them as "mere infants" as there was jealousy and quarreling among them over whom they should follow: Paul or Apollos. The lesson was that no man can lay a foundation other than Jesus Christ, and that those who choose to build their foundation on anything else will be shown for what it is, and it will not last. Paul concludes that we are all of Christ and Christ is of God. This certainly goes a long way in demonstrating the value and importance of realizing that we are of one faith and one Lord as Rex Kovias has stated.

A subject of importance that we must accept concerning the 2.5 billion world followers of Christ, is that there can be as many 2.5 billion sectarian codes of belief, each defining a unique manner of worship. Rex Kovias states that such codes, though important to the beholder, mean very little to our Lord. Examples of such codes that separate

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us revolve around our own interpretations of scripture: What day of the week is the sabbath? How much water do we use to baptize? Must we be baptized to be saved? I'll stop at three such examples. As highly intellectual theologians continue to pile on this enormous mountain of biblical interpretations that become denominational divisions, what would be a better effort on their part is to teach that we must realize the diversity amongst believers and to view such diversity as a strength rather than a reason to find fault. Once again, referencing Rex Kovies advice, we should do everything for the glory of the Lord, as 1 Corinthians 10:31 states and, as Paul concludes, we're to be motivated to do so not for our own good but the good of the many so that they may be saved. This is quite a good summary in that disciples of nations must be saved.

We should become acutely aware that within the 2.5 billion worldwide followers of Christ, there could exist as many as 2.5 billion different points of view in how to properly relate to the Lord. Such points of view exist as a result of thinking through how our behavior and habits should be shaped to be pleasing to Christ and suddenly, we arrive to believing that His judgement of our relationship with Him pertains to what we do rather than who we are. Putting matters of the mind ahead of our heart leaves us in risk as there are so many options to choose from that can quickly be altered by the next person in line that has a seemingly better education and instruction to follow. Instead, Christ requires us to remain fixed on who we are, which is based solely on matters of the heart. Specifically, we are to after God's heart and suddenly 2.5 billion people are united in one priority, which is to be in harmony with our one God, actively seeking to live in obedience to God and treasure his majesty. To demonstrate this contrast, allow me to provide a couple of role-play examples: Imagine someone feeling it important to not eat meat as they feel it an abomination in their worship. In stating this to Christ Jesus within their prayers, Jesus responds, "That's fine, but do you love me?" They respond just as Peter did in John 21: 15-17, "Yes Lord, You know that I love you." The next person states, "Lord, I believe that I must be baptized to be saved." Jesus' responds, "That's fine, but do you love me?" And, of course, this person responds, "Yes Lord, you know that I love you." As these two role plays portray, such ideologies are fine for the beholder, all 2.5 billion of them, but they don't come close to the heart of the matter: Do you love possess agape love for Jesus- totally unconditional? Who we are is foundational and stems from the hearts of many seeking to have the same heart from one God that allows each person to have the eyes of God within our souls to see all things from his perspective. Aha! Unity at last.