

Need We Be Divided?

Did God intend for those who wanted to follow Him to be divided? Were Catholicism and the ensuing Protestant denominational movement natural outgrowths of the pattern that the Lord established in the New Testament? Do the hundreds of religious groups calling themselves “Christian” today really need to exist? Is it impossible to achieve unity in Christ or must we be divided? The question in this article’s title can actually be answered correctly with both a “no” and a “yes.”

No, we need not be divided for God has given us the single tool that united the church in the first century and can still unite all in Christ today. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy words is truth.” (John 17:17). A few sentences further into that prayer He said, “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.” (John 17:20-21). God’s Word is that which unifies. Man’s misuse of that Word is the origin of religious division.

Paul wrote, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (I Corinthians 1:10-13). That unity is possible is evident in verse ten. Why would Paul plead for removal of division and that all be perfectly joined together in the same mind and judgment if such were not possible? The basis for his plea is found in the same verse when he urged all to “speak the same thing.” What was that “same thing” that they were to speak that would destroy division and promote unity? Since the unity for which Christ prayed was based on God’s Word, it’s clear that the unity for which Paul pleaded was based on that same Divine revelation.

We need not be divided religiously. God has given His perfect Word. The New Testament shows us God’s pattern for salvation, the Lord’s church and how to live daily in a way that is pleasing to God. There need not be any disagreement over this. Still, men have come along promoting their own ideas above those given by God through His inspired writers. Some have sought to draw others after themselves (Acts 20:30). Some say that it is not possible to come to agreement on spiritual matters. But are not those who so claim guilty of saying that God was not powerful enough to give us a book that can be understood and followed throughout time? Mark it down. Wherever there is division, there is someone who has rejected God’s Word as their standard. Whatever religious group with which you affiliate yourself, be it Catholic, Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran or any of a host of others, you need to carefully examine your doctrines in the light of the New Testament. Don’t just write it off and say that’s for “those who are called” or “the clergy” to do. Don’t leave your eternity in someone else’s hands. Since each of us will stand before God in judgment (II Corinthians 5:10) and since each of us will be judged by the Word of God (John 12:48), it behooves each of us to know that Word and to follow it. This Word is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword.” (Hebrews 4:12). It has the ability to unite, but only the hearts of those who will obey.

On the other hand, the question, “Need we be divided?” can be answered in the affirmative. If individuals claim to be Christians and yet reject the New Testament as their authority, those who are intent on adhering to God’s Word cannot have fellowship with them. Bible-based fellowship is predicated upon agreement with God. John wrote, “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (I John 1:6-7). Later the same writer warned, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” (II John 9-11).

Acceptable fellowship with those who reject God's Word, even though they may claim to be Christians, is no more possible than acceptable fellowship with those who openly adhere to the teachings of Buddha, Mohammed and other leaders of man-made religions.

Because God has blessed the world with His perfect Word which gives us "all things that pertain unto life and godliness" (II Peter 1:3), we need not be divided. People can be united in Christ, based on the New Testament Jesus died to establish (Hebrews 9:15-17). If not, why not? However, as long as mankind persists in attempts to pervert God's Word and as long as people blindly follow these false teachers without examining God's Word on their own, division will continue on earth, and ultimately, in eternity. We can put an end to religious division. We just need to get back to the Bible.

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