

# UNITY AND MATURITY GO HAND IN HAND

I've been a Christian since I was very young. I've read my Bible regularly for all of these years. I went to a Bible College and have a B.A. in Missiology from there. And yet I had never noticed, until an inter-denominational/inter-racial pastor's gathering last year where a speaker pointed it out, that when the Apostle Paul was speaking to the Corinthians about his having to deal with them as spiritual infants instead of adults, it had to do with their divisions! Let me show you this passage. I Corinthians 1:10-13 says, *"Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgement. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each of you is saying, "I am of Paul", and "I am of Apollos", and "I am of Cephas" and "I am of Christ". Has Christ been divided?..."* He then goes on in Chapter 3:1-4 saying, *"and I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?"*

What are these passages describing more clearly than present day denominationalism? Replace the names of Paul, Apollos and Cephas with Luther, Wesley, Calvin, the Pope, MacArthur, Copeland and others. It's the same situation with different names!

I've been marveling at a few things as I've thought about this passage lately. First of all, I've been marveling at how, after all these years of ministry and Christian life, I've never felt the weight of this passage until after we began Heart of the City. Secondly, I marvel at how divided the Church really is, in spite of the clarity of this passage. I also marvel at how, based on what is programmed for, spoken about and what Christians do in most churches, unity in the Body of Christ (outside our own congregations) seems to not even be on the list of priorities or important topics. **HOW CAN THIS BE?!** We can't help but wonder if, because unity is necessary for the maturity of the Body and as Jesus said in John 17:23, that our unity is the sign to the world that Jesus was sent from the Father, Satan hasn't just placed an incredible veil over the eyes of the Church so that it cannot even see the importance of being united.

Another thought has struck me while pondering this passage. If unity is what it takes for us to receive solid spiritual food and be mature, that would imply the Church as a whole is in a spiritually infantile state!! **What could that mean?!** Just think of the power, understanding, wisdom and abilities of a grown adult compared to an infant! I can only imagine what the power and the glory of the Church would be if we could be fed spiritual meat instead of milk, and would grow into mature spiritual adulthood because we grasped the reality of a unified Church! Yet somehow, most of us are content and not even concerned about our division.

But the harsh reality is, unity is very difficult to achieve. Sometimes it seems that there is nothing we can do about our divisions. Romans 12:18 says, ***“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”*** On a personal level, when a person has been wronged or mistreated by another believer without them acknowledging it, it can be a very difficult and murky path to reconciliation. On a racial level, when one “race” of Christians wrongs, minimizes and violates another “race” of Christians over and over again, over years of time, while spiritualizing it’s actions, it makes it very difficult for the recipients of such violations to want to unify. On a larger scale, we run into many genuine theological disagreements between the denominations. These are deep, complicated and difficult issues to try to address. So we have no pat answers, and we find ourselves struggling in the quest for Biblical unity. **But the bottom line is, unity is necessary and vital!** As individuals, churches and church leaders, we need to pursue it in every way we can. We may think that we’re doing just fine focusing on our own church. We may feel that we are fighting a good battle on our own. In fact, we’ve talked to people who would interpret “be at peace with all men” as meaning, “Leave well enough alone. I won’t bother you as long as you don’t bother me. Why should that person’s or this church’s problems matter to me?! I’ve got enough problems of my own.” And yet listen to what the Bible says in Philippians 2:1-4, ***“If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.”*** God does not hold a “live and let live” philosophy! And if it is true that we are in an infantile spiritual state while we remain divided, imagine the power of the army and the victories we could obtain if we were united! I believe it would make our current divided efforts look like babies trying to fight against tanks. And let us never forget that we don’t war against each other—flesh and blood—but against spiritual forces of darkness. As much as anything we do, we must pray and fight a spiritual battle. Heart of the City is here to be a place for believers to join together regularly to worship together and pray for the unity of the Body and for the salvation of the lost—while not having to leave their own church. It certainly doesn’t address or answer all the problems, but it is a good place to start! Let’s become a united army together in this city to fight for the cause of Christ!