

Christ Is the “One” of Oneness

By R.T. Nusbaum

God has called the church to be One, but the church is severely divided -- it is severely fragmented. What does it mean to be divided? It means it is no longer One. It is not functioning as branch to Vine. The great sin of the church is not the issues over which it is divided but that it is divided at all, for Paul asks: "Is Christ divided?" Until we see the "One" that we are, we will remain divided. We may seek to find likeness and things over which we can come together but we will miss the One, which is Christ.

There is a difference between saying we are One with other believers and in expressing the One that we are. We are not just supposed to be One in theory. The practical reality of being One lies in the fact that we each express Christ Who is the life of the body. There is no theoretical oneness. You are either one by virtue of Christ or you are not one at all. Many say that the church is One, but that is not even true theologically if Christ is not the image that we are seeking to be conformed unto. Emphasize all the differing points you want, but oneness comes only in living Christ as a corporate expression. It is either Christ and therefore we are One and functioning as One, or it is not Christ and there is absolutely no Oneness to be found, even if we agree on a majority of doctrinal points. So you see, the problem is not that we are divided from one another but that we are first divided from Him.

The sin is not the issues that divide but the body not holding the Head and acknowledging that He is the One that we exist to express. To leave the One and move to issues of how to baptize, etc. seems to be tragic. The sad thing is not that we would haggle over issues but that we would leave our true purpose of expressing One. It is not even that the Lord's people are separated from one another but that we are separated from Him as the One.

Competition between the differing church groups is wrong, but it is not the greater sin. The greater sin is the testimony to the world that Christ is divided. The prayer of Jesus in John 17 was that the world would see the kind of Oneness that was between the Father and the Son. The Son manifested the Father. Jesus is not worried the world will see that we do not get along; His concern lies in the fact of whether we will express Him as our fullness to the world.

I do not care if you have five thousand different denominations, each with a few issues that differ from one another, as long as each is expressing Christ and functioning according to the eternal plan. Differences do not have to divide, but there is no hope for unity if we leave the One. God does not look on the architectural design of your church, He looks on the heart. He is not heart-broken over church buildings; He is heart-broken when His branches leave the Vine.

We keep making the issue of division the problem when lack of manifesting the living Christ is the problem. We seem to be less concerned for the real issues and more concerned that denominationalism grieves the heart of the Lord and that denominations were never ordained by our Lord. But consider this: if there was only one denomination and everyone in it agreed doctrinally and yet were not expressing His fullness, He would be even more greatly grieved. The church is not a particular denomination or group that holds a particular set of beliefs that is more right than anybody else. The church is made up of those who allow Christ to be their life and their fullness in expression. The church is the Body of Christ that dwells from above. ***