

The Unity of the Church

That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

(John 17:21)

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SUMMARY

The unity of the church	5
Jesus' pray	5
1. Which the standard of unity the Lord wants?	5
2. Where this unity must happen?	5
3. This unity is spiritual and invisible or practical and visible?	5
4. This unity is possible	8
Answering some questions or objections	8
1. How do we see ourselves? Do we believe that everyone is wrong and we are the only correct?	8
2. As we see the denominations?	9
3. Why do we have no name?	9

The unity of the Church

When we talk about church restoration, no aspect is more important, more sublime nor closer to the heart of the Lord than the aspect of unity. Also, no other subject is so difficult, so controversial, and so attacked by Satan like this one. Surely, that is what he fears the most.

Jesus' prayer (Joh 17:18-23)

This prayer reveals the innermost yearnings of the Lord's heart. Everyone who sincerely love the Lord, should pay great attention to what it is revealed here. Let us look at four clear things in this passage.

1. Which the standard (level) of unity the Lord wants

The verse 21 show us: "as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us". This is the level that the Lord requires for our fellowship. Can you imagine some kind of discord, animosity, dispute or disagreement between the Father and the Son? The unity is perfect, and as such it must be with us.

Some say: "I accept the brothers of any denomination". This is better than nothing, but it is not the standard that satisfies our Lord. Watchman Nee used to say that it is to hold hands over the wall.

2. Where this unity must happen?

Some say: "In heaven will be wonderful, there will not be Baptist or Pentecostal or Presbyterian. It will be only one church". The question we must ask is: "but is there world in heaven?" The Vs. 21 says, "so that the world may believe". Jesus speaks of unity here on earth, to show the world what is His love when poured out into the hearts (see John 13:34, 35, Act 2:44,47; 4:32, 5:13).

3. This unity is spiritual and invisible or practical and visible?

The argument is the same as the previous question. How the world will see the love of the disciples if unity is invisible? If that is for the world to believe, must be something the world can see. However, this needs further clarification. There are actually three expressions about the church:

Universal Church

The unity of the universal church is a spiritual unity, mystical and invisible. This is the “every family” that Paul talks about in Eph 3:14-15.

See Mat 16:18, Heb 12:22-23; Act 9:31.

Local Church

See Act 8:1, 13:1, 14:23, Rom 16:1, 1 Cor 1:2, 2 Cor 1:1; 1 The 1:1, Rev 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14.

The unity of the local church must be practical and visible. As it was in the times of the first apostles. There was only one church in each locality. Wherever appears “churches” (plural), was referring to many different locations in a region, or continent, or the whole world (Act 15:41, Rom 16:4, 1 Cor 16:1, Gal 1:2, Rev 1:4).

This unity is expressed mainly by the presence of a single direction or government, through a single group of presbyters (always plural), which together oversee the local church (Act 14:23, 20:17, 21:18, Tit 1:5).

The apostles were zealous for this unity. Whenever there was any possibility of divisions in the practical unity of the local church, the apostles would go after it to correct immediately, and in some cases, emphatically. Almost all of Paul’s letters carries some warning concerning the division problem as well as the importance of unity. Let’s see:

- . **To the Romans:** Rom 16:17-18. It does not seem that Rome had very serious problems, but Paul does not cease from seriously warn saying that those who cause divisions do not serve our Lord Christ.
- . **To the Galatians:** Gal 5:15,19-21. The warning here is very serious. Those who practice hatred, strife, jealousy, outbursts of wrath, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, etc. will not inherit the kingdom of God.
- . **To the Ephesians:** Eph 2:13-18. The cross of Jesus overcame two barriers: the veil of the temple was torn. That destroyed the enmity that existed between man and God. Moreover, it says that the dividing wall has broken down. That destroyed the enmity amongst men (the enmity between Jews and Gentiles is the greatest the world ever knew, just look to the second World War and the Middle East). This enmity was annihilated at the cross of the Christ. Logically, this is only valid in the church. But what about the other enmities and divisions in the church? Is it

acceptable to sew back the veil? **NOT**. Is it acceptable to raise up dividing walls? **NOT**. We conclude that our divisions are a denial of the cross of Jesus Christ. Let us repent.

- Eph 3:6,14-15. One body, one family.
- Eph 4:1-6. To know that there is only one body, strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit through humbleness, gentleness, patience and love, is the only way to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which we have been called.
- Eph 4:13,16. The Lord's purpose is to lead us to unity of faith and body (the whole body working harmoniously).
- Eph 5:27. Do we want Jesus to come back to get a church stained and defective, full of factions and enmity? **NOT!**
- **To the Philippians.** Php 1:27. Here we see the three levels of unity (in a single verse). Again Paul says that this is the worthy way to live the gospel - "striving together..." Today, not only do we not fight together, but some are fighting against each other.
 - Php 2:1-4. In Philippos, it seems that a problem was emerging (4:2). How zealous Paul was in sort those things up! How can we neglect such words? This is the only way to follow Christ (Php 2:5 -8). Paul still insists more on the vs. 12-14.
- **To the Corinthians.** 1Co 1:10-13; 3:1-4. It was the most critical situation. Reason why Paul was more energetic. He called the Corinthians carnal and children in Christ. Some defenders of factions argue based on this text that back in that time there were divisions. Let's see well what was there. They were forming "cliques" in the church order by ministry preferences. Paulo considered this a great carnality, **but they still were all together as one only church in town!** (1Co 1:2). If Paul called them carnal and childish, just because they were with preferences and parties within the church, what would he say about us today? Because we, besides being full of disagreements like them, are also physically separated. You think this way, you stay there. I think differently, I stay here. Everyone creates his own little church. **This is all an aberration. In fact, our situation is far worse than that of the Corinthians.** We need profound repentance.
- **To All Christians.** (1Jo 2:5,10; 3:11,14,16-18,23; 4:7,8,11,12,20,21; 5:1). Such abundance of exhortations should make us meditate on our situation.

The church in a house

The church in the houses were not a division of the local church. There was no self administration, a separate government (as we have seen, the presbyters were locals). The Separation in the household churches, was not from doctrinal divisions, disputes or separation in the leadership, but it was strategically separated into smaller groups, for the best performance of the saints' service Eph 4:11-12,15-16.

See ACT 2:46, 5:42, Rom 16:15, 1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15; Phi 2.

4. This unity is possible (Joh 17)

When we look at the current situation, we can fill ourselves up with doubt. Would it be possible? However, we have to look not to the circumstances, but to the Lord. Jesus' prayer itself give us faith. Just by thinking that, will not the Father answer the prayer of the Son? The Spirit testifies in our hearts: yes, He will. The Son will have for Himself a glorious bride, blameless, wrinkleless, holy and blemishless. **Hallelujah!**

Considering the determination of God:

Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.' (Isa 46:9-10)

Truefully, God has already done in these days, many things that cooperate with the unity. Everywhere there is a cry in the hearts of God's people. Many are discontented with the divisions. Throughout the world we heard about church unity. In Many cities God is raising some few leaders that are taking concrete steps towards effective unity. What has been experienced in some parts of the world must encourage us to continue.

Bring back our captivity, O Lord, as the streams in the South! (Psa 126:4)

Answering Some Questions or Objections

1. How do we see ourselves? Do we believe that everyone is wrong and we are the only correct?

No. We see ourselves as part of the problem. We do not intend to be "the church" or "the testimony of God" as the brothers that are linked to Witness Lee's ministry (known as local church). We see this issue with simplicity and reality. The church is sadly divided into hundreds of factions.

We are just one of these factions. Maybe the biggest difference between us and the other brothers, is that we are unsatisfied with this fact. We abominate the current reality, and fight against it with all our strength, through prayer and preaching.

2. How do we see denominations?

We Loved the brothers who are in the denominations. But do not agree with the denominational position. In the dictionary denote is "to give a name to, to name it". The simple reality is that the church is divided into several factions. As we have seen, much worse than in Corinth. Yet, instead of repenting, we name each faction and consider the problem solved. In truth, the denomination itself is to officialize the division. The denomination intends to turn the sin of division into an acceptable thing, a "normal status", which makes it difficult for the church to acknowledge its mistake. **The problem is not that we are separated, but that we are separated and, at the same time, satisfied and content.** The "cliques" of the Corinthians were carnality. To transform them in separated groups would be unacceptable for the apostles. And finally, giving each of these groups names like "Church A, B, or C" would be utterly absurd.. And that is what it is done today.

3. Why do we have no name?

This question is already partially answered in the question above. But we would add something more. Some have tried to "place a mark on our foreheads" by calling us a "community". But we can not cope with it. Why? Because when we come to Christ we have already received our identity of God's children along side with all the others who believe in the Lord. We Are Children of God with the whole church (Eph 3:14-15). **We will never accept another identity besides the one we have already received.** **We will never going to accept an identity that is derived from our division with the other brothers.** We abominate the fact that we are separated from our brothers. There is not much that we can do about it, but to pray and seek fellowship with all. Yet, we refuse to accept an identification. This would violate our conscience. Some get offended with our position. It saddens us, but there is nothing we can do about it.



*To Him be glory in the church by Christ
Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.
Amen.*

(Eph 3:21)