

Voices: Church, if you're going to fight, fight for unity

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The church locally and globally must fight for unity for us to be salt and light to the world around us. Such unity is our public witness.

Jesus told his disciples, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35).

The natural response to this teaching is, "How do we walk in unity when there are so many differences?"

My response is simply, "Read the Bible, and do what it says."

This answer probably seems glib. You may think it is a cop-out, but I really mean it.

Paul's letters as instruction for church unity

Paul wrote the majority of his epistles to churches. We often take away the power of his words by trying to individualize them, but they were written to communities and should be applied with this truth in mind.

He wrote to churches dealing with race, class, gender and cultural divides, and he called them to unity over and over in the midst of those divides. Over and over, Paul called the churches back to Jesus.

If we believe Paul's letters are the inspired word of God, we should read them and practice his prescriptions for church unity.

Putting the struggle for unity into practical terms

We won't all agree on every issue. We will hold passionate disagreements on a whole host of issues. But we can still seek unity.

Unity is not uniformity, and it is not conformity in our preferences. Unity of the church is found in diversity coming together around Jesus.

How can we begin to fight for unity as the church?

One of the ways we can fight for unity is to live out the call of Jesus practically. Put into practice Jesus' call to "love one another."

Consider our words. What do we communicate to the world about Jesus through how we love one another with our words? For example, what do we communicate to the world about Jesus based on the comments section of our Facebook posts? What do we communicate to the world about Jesus based on the way we talk about other churches and other believers?

Unity is a struggle when politics comes first

I have come to believe one of the greatest barriers to the unity of the church today is the golden calf of partisan politics. We have allowed political fear and anger to dictate our responses to other believers and the world around us rather than basing our responses on love.

As the body of Christ, we have to see one another as brothers and sisters in the faith. We have to start with this truth before we identify one another by political party.

The kingdom of God unites across the dividing walls of our culture, just as it did in Paul's day. Yet, today we have chosen to hide behind memes and to make sweeping statements about one another in ways we would find difficult to do if we actually sat down and talked, broke bread and prayed together.

The world needs our unity, not our division

I'm tired of the division. I'm tired of the anger and the fighting over issues that don't make a difference in the kingdom of God.

It is time for the church to stand together. It is time for us to log off, to quit painting one another in the worst possible light, and to reach out for and to love one another—in practical ways.

The world has enough anger and fear. What the world needs is a church that loves Jesus and loves one another. What the world needs is a church that lays down its preferences and strives for the unity of the church and the good of others. What the world needs is for us to do what the Bible says.

We won't answer for our fidelity to a political party, but we will answer for our faithfulness to live out Jesus' call to love one another. The church will find unity when its members love one another in the midst of all our differences.

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