

'With One Another According to Christ Jesus'

by Bryan Anthony

The key to achieving unity in the Church is to be 'of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus', which requires being transformed and coming into a oneness of mind and heart 'according to Christ Jesus'.

Scripture: Acts 1:14, Romans 11:36, Romans 15:5

Topics: "Church Unity", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

Bryan Anthony delves into the importance of understanding the cultural background of the Bible writers to interpret the Scriptures authentically. He emphasizes that Paul, as a 'citizen of heaven,' spoke from a heavenly culture, aiming for unity and harmony in the Body of Christ. Anthony highlights the need for Christians to be of one mind according to Christ Jesus, not just superficially, but through genuine conversion and transformation, aligning their perspectives and desires with Christ's.

Transcript

"Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." -Rom. 15.5-6

Here is one of those apostolic statements that we read in our own native language, but it's veritable reality evades us, for we haven't got a proper interpretive grid. The scholars note that we often misunderstand the Scriptures because we haven't a legitimate understanding of the cultural background of the writers, and we fail to come into an authentic exegesis (interpretation) of the text. This is utterly crucial for Biblical interpretation, and for this reason it is helpful to delve into the work that gifted scholars have done for the benefit of the saints. But often we fail to come into a proper understanding of the text because we fail to realize that men like Paul spoke not merely out of a Jewish or Hellenistic vein, but rather from the vantage point of a heavenly culture. Paul's apostolic milieu was not first born of Jewish or Greek paradigms, but of a Kingdom which had at it's center the Man Christ Jesus.

Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, to be sure, and he also had great insight into the Hellenistic/Greek world. But he was preeminently a "citizen of heaven," and he spoke to the saints out of that remarkable place. For this reason, texts like this one in Romans 15 strike us as evasive, high-spirited, and difficult to grasp.

Any man who has made efforts to bring unity and harmony in the Body of Christ knows of the virtual impossibility of such a pursuit. We are so shot through with schisms and suspicions, denominational

prejudices and familial divisions, competitive ministries and jealous pastors, that all the calls to city-wide prayer and regional Church unity have done little to establish the kind of reality that Paul was here expressing. This is the actuality of things, whether we admit it or not, and though there may be breakthroughs here and there, they are hit and miss in light of the larger picture.

What then could produce the kind of glory that the apostle is so effortlessly describing?

Vv. 5-6 constitute a benediction of sorts in which Paul invokes the aid of God in creating a unified group of Christians in Rome. Those Christians need to be of one mind in regard to how they respect and treat one another.

.... [Oneness of mind] occurs regularly in the early part of Acts when Luke describes the like-mindedness of the earliest Jerusalem fellowship (Acts 1.14; 2.46; 4.24; 5.12; 7.57). One reason for Christians to be unified is so that they may collectively and with one heart and voice glorify God. 'If praise in worship no longer bears witness in this way to daily fellowship, the community cannot exist.'

(Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary, Ben Witherington III; Eerdmans, 2004; p. 342- Kasemann's thought is in quotations)

Did you note the words used? "Paul invokes the aid of God in creating a unified group of Christians in Rome." Only a foundational man like Paul could speak thusly, as having come right out of the holy place and unto the community of saints. Apart from the miracle of the new birth itself, there is nothing more remarkable than that God should redeem a conglomeration of souls from various backgrounds, opinions and preferences, and put them in the melting pot of grace and truth until the day when their corporate existence is summed up in the nature and character and glory of the Son of God. Can you fathom such a community? Where does one of this kind exist? And how is a "unified group of Christians" created?

Only apostolic men have the authority, character, power, and oratorical grace to speak into a heathenized culture, and to witness their own proclamations having this kind of an affect; namely, bringing the revelation of Jesus Christ, as He is, to the forefront of their corporate consciousness. I think this obscure and oft-overlooked portion of v. 5 is the key to the whole thing:

".... of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus."

This is not some kind of subjective, human effort for unity, by which we declare, "Well, at least we have Jesus in common. Let's agree to disagree on the 'non-essentials' and have our respective movements. You do your thing, and we will do ours, and all will be well."

If that is the unity we are after, we have dramatically and woefully fallen short of the glory of Jesus' intention for the Church. To be of the "same mind" does not have to do with ecumenically admitting that we serve the same Lord. It has to do with being converted and transformed, wrenched loose from the spirit of this age, even in all it's religious trappings, and coming into a oneness of mind and heart "according to Christ Jesus."

What is His own perspective and desire? Have we given ample time to considering and hearing from Him? Are our ministries "from Him, through Him, and to Him," or are they from us, through us, and to our own secret glory?

The apostolic Gospel takes us out of man-centered thinking, and places us face down on the threshold of God's greatness and glory. God Himself gives "perseverance and encouragement" when we come to Him on His grounds, and He creates in His house the kind of authentic and heavenly unity that only flourishes through the work of the cross in the innermost parts.

Though we may smile and pat one another on the back, we are far from this glory in our cities, dear saints. And the evidence of this is that we are not glorifying the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ "with one voice." The witness of Jesus Christ, His cross, resurrection, ascension, and soon return is scarcely sounded in our cities with any kind of apostolic power, and the unbelievers around us are not hearing the distinct word from heaven, particularly of the kind that Paul bore throughout Asia Minor. We are depleted because we have been about our own business, rather than seeing to it that our lives and ministries were flowing from that awesome source- the glorification of God in the Church, "according to Christ Jesus."

Until He is again the center and circumference of all that we are as Church, we will lack that distinctive "voice" that shook Jerusalem in the first century.

Paul is consciously concluding his final argument with echoes of where he began his discourse. He began with prayer in 1.9-12 and ends there as well.

(ibid., p. 343)

Paul prayed fervently for such a Church, and the call rests all the more on us, as the Day of the Lord draws near. He is after a transcendent community, whose corporate personality is literally that of His own Son, and it is not some aloof ideal that Paul has concocted. It is the very cry of Jesus, and we can be sure that it will be established in the earth. Let us join with the cry of Paul, and more eminently, the cry of the Lord Himself. Let us give ourselves to prayer for the formation of this Church of "one mind," that the saints would live their lives, and gather corporately, "according to Christ Jesus."

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. -Rom. 11.36

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