

For Shinangye: September 2006
Towards a Theology of Unity – A Series
V – The Source of Our Unity

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Over the past several months, we have been reviewing what Scripture teaches concerning the unity of the Body of Christ, the unity of the Church. I have stated that bringing the Church together in unity is the most important task before us as we prepare for the opening of North Korea. I have also pointed out that this task is not only for the opening of North Korea, it is the heart's desire of God and a necessary step in gaining the world for the Kingdom of God. This series on unity has been a modest attempt to lay a foundation for a Biblical theology upon which the various different denominations within the Body of Christ might begin to seek true unity – not unity of organization or the lowest common denominator but unity of heart in love and obedience to the Holy Spirit.

This month, I bring this series to a close with a look at the source of our unity.

There are many passages in Scripture that encourage unity. One of my favorites is Psalm 133:

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!
It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard,
even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of
Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there
the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

Unity was one of St. Paul's major themes. See Romans 12:3-13; Chapters 13 and 14; I Corinthians chapters 12-14; Galatians 6; Ephesians chapters 4 and 5; Philippians 2:1-8; Colossians 3 and so on in just about every letter that he wrote. Also, in his various writings, St. John speaks most eloquently of the importance of loving one another.

It is clear that our unity depends on love and the work of the Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and minds. We see time and again that outpourings of the Holy Spirit bring unity – the most famous being Acts 2 as well as 4:32 and following. We also know that when the unity is broken, we must be quick to repent and to forgive one another so that it may be restored.

But, how are we to become one in Him to begin with? Jesus gives us a very strange method – one so strange and repulsive that most of His followers left Him. He commanded us to eat His flesh and drink His blood! (See John 6:48-59.) How could He give His flesh and blood to be consumed? The answer, of course, is in His acts and words at the Last Supper – “Take eat, this is my body... this is my blood.” Jesus gave us a very specific, very concrete, very material thing to do – something that He demonstrated many times throughout His ministry: take bread, give thanks, break it, and eat. As we do that, we are feeding on his Body and Blood – we are becoming part of Him.

Paul makes it very clear in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 that this sharing in what Jesus called His very body and blood is the source of our unity – it brings us together.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

He also points out how real this is in the next chapter, verses 17-31. Verse 29 is especially important:

For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

To eat and drink without recognizing that we are part of one another, that *we* are one body is to bring condemnation on ourselves – it is a deadly real business.

For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (1Corinthians 11:30)

There are many different ideas within the Universal Church about the meaning of all this. Some see these things simply as symbolic ideas while others understand them in a much more real sense – more literal, if you will. I suggest that we simply take Christ's words as he gave them and Paul's as they appear to be. Let us not read more into them or take them for less than they appear. We need not understand fully – after all, who of us can fully understand the ways of almighty God? Communion has become a source of division among us – let it not be! Let it be a source of life and unity instead. I urge all well-meaning Christians to seek opportunities to share in the Communion of the Lord together frequently. If we do this continually, in humility and love, God will work among us and I truly believe that we will become one with each other.