

Tuesday's Touch ...#33

...from Pastor Ed ...September 08, 2009

Divided or Diverse?

By this shall all know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:35

...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism... Eph 4:3-5

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. Gal 1:8

The Church of Jesus Christ has struggled throughout history trying to find the balance between being faithful to her Lord and maintaining a unified witness among the various groups and factions of professing believers. Love for one another in the body of Christ and unity in purpose and spirit are exhorted throughout the New Testament. Such unity is demonstrated repeatedly in the book of Acts whenever there was a great moving of God among His people (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 2:24; 4:24; 5:12; et al).

However, we also find no lack of division and strife among professing Christians displayed in the same New Testament (Acts 6:1; 15:37-40; Gal 2:11-14; et al). While division can come from clearly sinful roots, we also find good people disagreeing, each holding to his or her position sincerely before the Lord. As we try to be obedient to our Lord in maintaining unity, we find that it isn't always as simple as saying, "all division is sinful and all unity is spiritual."

And so, we must not foolishly jettison *all* differences among us. It is often heard that we should put away all distinctive labels- all differences among the various groups of Christians, and just be "one in Christ." It is important that we carefully discern between division and diversity. It is horrible to have the arm severed from the body, but it would be just as harmful to have an arm that was no different than an ear (1 Corinth 12:14-17). Division harms the body, diversity strengthens the body.

Historically, within the pale of Biblical Christianity (broadly, those right about Christ and the Bible), each group has brought to the table some important truth(s) that the Church at large has needed to hear. I am old enough to remember when, in many very conservative evangelical churches, the Holy Spirit was little more than a doctrine to be

believed. Now, as a result of the charismatic explosion of the last thirty years or so, it would be difficult to find among these same conservative churches one that doesn't teach regularly on the necessity of the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit, even though they might reject out of hand the charismatic movement, itself. So, while we may have strong differences among the various groups of true evangelicals, we all absolutely need to consider what each one is saying, and to maintain love for our brothers and sisters in Christ despite those differences. Diversity strengthens the body.

On the other side of the coin, a limb that has become irreparably diseased must often be severed. We must (are commanded to) separate from and warn those individuals or groups that, under the banner of "Christianity", aggressively harm the body through teachings and/or actions which clearly stand against the living Christ and biblically revealed truth (Gal 1:8; 1 Tim 6:3-5; et al).

The healthiest state of the Church in this present age, therefore, is when the various groups of true Christians can work together in unity and love, while each maintains its distinctives in liberty of conscience; when she can engage in the strongest of debates within herself without sowing hatred and divisiveness among her children. To slightly modify a well known mantra:

In Christ, unity; in our distinctives, liberty; in all things, love.

Our Triune God,

As You are one in your being, yet diverse in your trinity, may your Church in this age be at unity within herself, as well as at peace with her manifold diversities. Give us the wisdom of your Holy Spirit to discern clearly when battle lines must be established and when they must be abolished. Grant that your true people might be known to the world by their love for one another.

Awaiting that perfect Day of unity,

Amen

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