

Christian Unity: "That the World May Know..."

Question: Christians all love and serve the same God. Does it really matter if we don't all agree on the various Christian teachings and beliefs? © Graham Osborne

Before I answer this, I want to tell you about an experience my wife and I had a few years ago. We were expecting our fourth little one when troublesome signs started showing. A few days later, we found ourselves in Emergency. Things quickly progressed to the worst, and as my wife and I sat weeping and overwhelmed, several people around us spontaneously gathered in fervent prayer, laying their hands on my wife's stomach and asking Jesus to take care of my wife and I and our little one. I sat there in shock, with a rough copy of this very article I had been working on at the time in my hands. But I knew God had shown me something very important at that moment, as difficult as it was.

These were good and prayerful people. They were not Catholic, but from our conversations beforehand, unquestionably they were devout Christians with a great love for Jesus and their neighbor. During a very friendly chat, one lady had even remarked that it was still the same God that we both worshipped, and we both knew this to be true.

All of this was good, very good. So if it was the same God, and we all loved and served Him, wasn't that "good enough"? Did it really matter that we all agree on the various teachings Jesus had left us, some of great importance and some of lesser? But as I reflected more on the day, what I was trying to say in this particular article hit me with blinding clarity. Yes, it absolutely mattered! But *why*?

The most obvious reason is that Jesus wants *everybody* to follow the teachings He left us – *all of them!* He desires this unity (see 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Corinthians 12:13,27, Eph 4:1-6, Rom 16:17-18 and Eph 4:11-14). In fact, He has commanded it! In the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28, Jesus sends the Apostles out to baptize and "make disciples of all nations... teaching them to observe **ALL** that" He has commanded. **ALL!** Jesus also tells us: "this is love of God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3, John 14:21). So if we truly love God, we will observe **all** that He has commanded.

But here is a key question. 2000 years later, how can we be *sure* of **ALL** that Jesus commanded? How can we be sure we're getting it right? Someone might quickly reply, "we follow the Bible!" But look at the incredible melt down in Christian beliefs we are seeing today. The fruit of following the "Bible alone" has been utter Christian disunity, to the tune of thousands of different denominations – all with their own set of beliefs, and many of them both important and contradictory. They are all following the "Bible alone", but they are often getting radically different understandings of what Jesus taught by doing this.

Following Scripture alone simply doesn't work! And it doesn't work because Jesus *never* intended it to! He didn't first come to earth to write the Bible [though He of course wanted it to be written, and in fact, inspired it], He came *first* to found His Church!

It is to His Church that He entrusts all His truths and His authority – "He who hears you hears me" [Luke 10:16]. He builds this church on rock, on Peter and the Apostles, promising the gates of Hell will not prevail against it. And He appoints Peter as head of His Church in an unending office that stretches back to the time of King David [see Matthew 16:16-19 in light of Isaiah 22:19-22], and gives him the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, and the power to bind and loose on Earth, as it is in Heaven. He gives this Church the power to baptize, cast out demons, to forgive sins and to heal [see John 17:17-18, Mark 6:7-13, John 20:21-23, Mat 28:18-20]. He inspires the New Testament to be written by its members, and leaves the Church with the proper understanding of its words, sending His Holy Spirit

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to protect it from error and “guide it into all the truth” [John 14:26, John 15:15-17, John 16:13]. *This is why Jesus left us the Church. It is His Church that is “the pillar and foundation of truth” [1 Timothy 3:15. And it is through this Church that we can know ALL that He has commanded, not by the Bible alone.*

But there is yet another **VERY** critical aspect to this whole issue of following **all** that Jesus has taught, and perhaps the most important of all – one of global, eternal significance to every person on earth, past, present and future. We get a sense of it throughout Sacred Scripture, but nowhere is it clearer than in the last few hours of Jesus’ life, specifically in John 17:20-23.

Jesus is in the upper room with the Apostles. He has just instituted the Eucharist. He is praying to His Heavenly Father, both for the Apostles, and **ALL** who will come to believe in Him. This is the *very last* teaching He will leave the Apostles before He is arrested and crucified. Do you think it’s important?

With His eyes raised to heaven, Jesus says, *“I pray... for those who will believe in me... so that they may **all** be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me. And I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, **that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that you sent me, and that you loved them even as you loved me.”***

Did you catch that? Jesus twice says that the **world** will come to **believe** that the Father sent Him through the **unity** it sees in His followers. This is profound! This is truly the heart of evangelization – that God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. And the unity Jesus speaks of here is not just a whimsical, “close-enough, we all love Jesus” sort of unity, as good as that is. He describes it as “**perfect**” unity, the **same** unity that He has with the Father.

Does it matter whether we know and follow **all** that Jesus commanded, and that all Christians are united in the same beliefs and doctrines? Unquestionably yes! The faith of an unbelieving world depends on it. And the world must be scandalized by the contradictory beliefs, infighting and lack of unity it sees among Christians today.

Does it matter whether you’ve been baptized? Without question. Jesus commanded it. What about the Eucharist? Jesus says, “Truly, truly...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53). What about the Pope, the Blessed Mother, good works, confession, purgatory, abortion, divorce and remarriage, contraception, homosexuality, even shopping on Sunday, and dozens of other important issues? Does it matter what we believe regarding all these things? Absolutely! Jesus has taught on every one of them and true Christian unity is at stake.

True Christian unity resides in following **all** of Jesus’ teachings, as revealed to the Church He left us. The perfect unity Jesus prayed for does not reside in agreeing to disagree. It resides in the fullness of truth that Jesus revealed to His Church. That is why **it matters** that all Christians come to know, agree on, and follow the teachings Jesus left us. And Jesus left the fullness of His truths to His Church – the Catholic Church, founded on Peter and the Apostles.

Perhaps St. Paul says it best in his first letter to the Corinthians: *“I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that **all** of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment”* (1 Cor 1:10). Christians **must** grow in unity. Jesus prayed fervently for it, and we must too! Truly united, by the grace of God, we will change the world - because then, the world **will** know...

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