

*Question: Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of the churches worshipped together and were not separated as they are? Can you explain some of the different church doctrines that separate us?*

Unity among all people of Christian faith would be wonderful. On the night before he was crucified, Jesus prayed for the unity of all who would come to believe in him (John 17:20ff). He was concerned that division among his followers would hinder others from coming to faith in him; thus, he prayed: "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (John 17:23).

However, I do not believe that knowing and understanding all of the different church doctrines would be helpful. For one thing, not every church has a denominational organizational structure or a creedal statement that defines what they believe. For example, the Churches of Christ are independent congregations without any organizational authorities above that of the local churches. Although these churches share a common fellowship with one another, they do not always agree with one another on every doctrinal matter. The same is true of other churches as well. In addition, to try to learn all of the doctrinal differences among various denominations would be an almost endless task. Even if we did come to know and understand the doctrinal teachings of all these churches, we would only have a knowledge of what various humans have concluded about God, Christ and the Word of God.

I prefer to commit my life to the study of God's word. I know this sounds a little naïve. Most denominational differences did not begin because someone just wanted to be different. They began because different people came to different conclusions about something the Bible teaches. However, I am still naïve enough to believe that a common commitment to Jesus and to a common standard of authority can give us a starting point in our pursuit of Christian unity. If we add to this a spirit of humility (Ephesians 4:2), a love of God and neighbor (Mark 12:30-33), a willingness to be quick to listen (James 1:19) and determination to speak with grace to one another (Colossians 4:6), we might have the ingredients to bring about some change in the Christian world.

Unfortunately, I remain pessimistic about achieving Christian unity in my lifetime. My naïve spirit can carry me only so far. Therefore, I am content to seek the spirit and attitude of Jesus (Philippians 2:5ff) and keep studying his word (2 Timothy 2:15). Then, if he is able to use me in some way to accomplish his purposes, I can only give him the praise. No matter what others may decide to do, it is not my desire to pass eternal judgment upon them. That is God's business. I believe my responsibility is to do as Peter charged his readers: "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11).

Perhaps the place for us to begin our pursuit of Christian unity is with a personal conversation between just the two of us. I feel confident that I am not the only one who has some thoughts about unity. If anyone would like to contact me, perhaps we can begin a conversation.

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