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What unites Christians?



What is it that unites Christians?

There are a number of Christian denominations and they give the appearance of disagreeing with each other even though they often can also appear as friends! At times it seems contradictory.

St Paul in his letters wrote about Christians being misled and disagreements arising. Saint Paul also wrote about Christians not all being identical people, so let us deal with that first because that can show us that all Christians are actually different people.

St Paul writes in 1 Corinthians at chapter 12 in the section beginning at verse 12:

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.

St Paul makes this point about different capabilities and gifts, of which all are equally important, in almost all his letters in the New Testament of the Bible. For St Paul it is a fundamental Christian reality. It is also a fundamental reality that we are one in our Lord Jesus Christ when he writes:

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”.

So, yes we are equal, because our different gifts, and we are all equally important. The gifts are different for each of us but the body functions as a whole and needs all of the different gifted people together. Yet we are also clearly all different.

Being different doesn't mean that everyone has the same view about everything, that idea has more to do with science fiction and horrendous ideas such as the book “Stepford wives” by Ira Laven (later made into a film of course), in which all the women were conditioned to believe and act the same, or like the ideas expressed by George Orwell in his book 1984 in which people were brain-washed to believe the same things even though they are clearly untrue.

St Paul himself founded early Churches of a wide variety of people, and all the people were different as they always are. Since the people in the Church were different he sometimes had to deal with disagreements.

So it is that St Paul writes in his letter to the Romans at chapter 16:

¹⁷ I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them.

The phrase “*avoid them*” can rightly be read as avoid the dissensions and offences and not just as avoiding the people who cause them.

In St Paul's letter to Titus we are told more about the same issue:

⁹ But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. ¹⁰ After a first and second admonition, have nothing more to do with anyone who causes divisions,

This means addressing the issue of the quarrel first, and only when they won't listen, then do not be seen as holding the same views with that person any longer.

In St Paul's letter to the Philippians he writes at chapter 3:

¹⁵ Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

These verses to the Philippians acknowledges to them that there will be disagreements and, more importantly, God's roles in showing us how to sort out the differences.

In the book of Acts we are told of a disagreement about whether or not gentile converts to Christianity should be circumcised just the same as Jews, and the story in Acts shows us that neither “side” was wrong but God gave visions and actions to show St Peter how to

resolve the matter. This is exactly in the same way that St Paul's letter to the Philippians describes (and, let us note, that St Paul was one of those involved in the original argument in the book of Acts, so then when he writes to the Philippians he is also drawing from his own experiences).

St Paul's letters to Timothy are also instructive to us.

In the 1st letter to Timothy we are told in chapter 1:

³ I urge you, instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, ⁴ and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith. ⁵ But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. ⁶ Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

In the 2nd letter to Timothy we are told in chapter 2:

¹⁴ Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. ¹⁵ Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. ¹⁶ Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, ¹⁷ and their talk will spread like gangrene.

So misunderstanding and disagreements have always happened but St Paul always preached "Christ crucified", as he himself told us, and showed us all how to agree in Jesus Christ. To be a Christian means that we believe in Jesus Christ and so that is what the word "CHRISTian" means. Disagreements are outside, or deviations from, Christianity. Like the example in the book of Acts show us that you can disagree within Christianity so long as you are completely open to God leading you in the true path and have the humility to say you are sorry when you realise you have made a mistake.

Therefore unity for all Christians is in Jesus Christ so it is only when the teaching goes astray and starts to change what Christ said that it goes wrong. The church has acted positively even in recent times with the formation of Gafcon that represents that vast majority of the worldwide Christian Church and clearly requires belief in Jesus Christ and the Bible as the cornerstone of everything we do and we believe.

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