

by ***Michael d'Offay***

Real Christians never disagree... right? God desires us to walk in unity but does this mean we need to agree on everything to do so? In this article, I want to explore what Christian unity looks like and how we can be one but not the same.

### **The real and the ideal**

In John 17, Jesus prayed that we would have a radical kind of unity; “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you” (Jn 17:21). Here Jesus shows us the ideal picture of unity- Himself and the Father.

If this is the prayer of Jesus, why hasn't this ideal, agree-on-all-things unity come about? It is because we are not yet mature as Christ wants us to be. Full maturity and ‘perfection’ will only come when Christ returns. Only then shall we truly become like him, “knowing fully” (1 Cor 13:12) and being in complete agreement.

As we grow into what Jesus wants for us, I've found this ancient Christian quote to be very helpful for our journey into unity. It says, *“In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity.”*



### **In essentials unity**

There are certain essential truths that must hold us together. These are things that the majority of Christians in the majority of places have always held to. Truths such as: the deity of Christ, the Trinity, salvation by grace through faith, and the infallibility of Scripture. These are the supporting pillars that must hold up our unity with all Christians everywhere. They are what make us Christian.

As four12, we hold to these (and other) orthodox truths, but as a movement, we also hold to some essential values. Essentials such as: a passion to see the church restored to authentic New Testament

roots, with the emergence of genuine apostles and five-fold gifts; eldership-led churches; a culture of mutual submission and honour; and seeing every believer to be a minister in the power of the Spirit. It is these values, among others, that are our essentials which help bring us together in unity.

### **In non-essentials liberty**

So is there a place for us to disagree on certain issues yet be in a deep unity? Yes, I believe there is. In the non-essentials (truths that are still very important but not essential for us to be in unity), our aim must to show liberty towards each other.

For example: among us we have those who are Calvinists who believe they can never lose their salvation, and those who are Arminians who believe that it is possible to have known Christ and fall away. We have leaders among us who differ on the manner of Jesus' return and the understanding of the tribulation and the millennium. We have those who are Tricotomists (who believe we are body, soul and spirit) and those who are Dicotomists (who believe we are body and soul/spirit)... and the list goes on!

The reason we can walk together is that we respect those who find their convictions rooted in scripture. We understand that these are issues that authentic Bible-believing Christians have differed on throughout church history.

So we admit that we "know in part" (1 Cor 13:12) and therefore we want to show grace to one another. This doesn't mean we have an 'anything goes' attitude- our liberty has boundaries.

In the New Testament, Paul allowed Christians liberty to differ on some issues. There were issues that arose that threatened to divide them, yet he wisely counselled these Christians to allow each other freedom to differ and to respect each other's conscience on some matters.

It seemed for Paul that if we keep the important truths as central (see 1 Cor 15:1-5), it is enough to keep us one in purpose and heart.

### **In all things charity**

Charity is the old english word meaning *love*. The world will know we are His disciples by our love for each other, rather than our zeal for doctrinal purity. Our common ground is a passionate love for the person of Jesus who embodies the truth and is always full of grace.

This apostolic 'field' called Four12 does have theological boundaries but we want to make sure that we never get so caught up with the detail of controversial texts that we miss the big picture- the command of Jesus to go and to make disciples of all nations. We are concerned about truth but we want to make sure it is truth that places Jesus at the centre.

So you will find that in our resources, each author or preacher will express their view on some subject.

This doesn't mean we all hold to those views within Four12, but because Jesus is our centre, we have given each other grace to hold to different views- without sacrificing truth or core values.

### **Growing into maturity**

Jesus prayer for the church to have a deep-seated unity is something we treasure and long for. Until we reach perfection, we will have differences, but as long as we hold to the dictum: *"In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity"*, we can partner together for His fame!



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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