

Unity and Diversity

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Most of the time we hear the term, *unity in diversity* and not *unity and diversity*. The first of these is a contradiction of terms. *Unity* is defined as “oneness” and diverse means “unlike” (*Webster’s 9th New Collegiate Dictionary*). When we substitute the definitions for the words themselves, we have: “Oneness in Unlikeness.” Just how can unlike things be one (**Amos 3:3**)? We may as well say “dryness in wetness” or “goodness in badness.” These words taken in their normal usage and paired as we have done them are nothing less than nonsense.

In the words, *unity and diversity*, we are saying that God’s Word demands “oneness,” “unity,” and “sameness” in matters of obligation. By *obligatory matters* we mean those things authorized by God’s Word by the various kinds of direct statements, those things implied by the Scriptures, or examples (patterns) contained therein (**Colossians 3:17**). The Bible authorizes in no other way than these. In fact, whether we realize it or not, in our own communication with one another these are the only means whereby any language or form of communication works. It is the very nature of language.

In **1 Corinthians 1:10** Paul said:

“NOW I BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, BY THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT YE ALL SPEAK THE SAME THING, AND THAT THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU; BUT THAT YE BE PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MIND AND IN THE SAME JUDGMENT.”

However, this same Paul so differed (not the same mind or judgment) with Barnabas over whether or not to take John Mark on their second preaching tour that they parted company (**Acts 15:36-41**). Is this the same Paul who wrote to the Corinthian brethren and begged them not to divide and to “BE PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER IN THE SAME MIND AND THE SAME JUDGMENT”? Did Paul preach one thing and practice something different? The answer is, “Of course not.”

Paul was begging the Corinthian brethren to be one in matters of obligation (i.e., those things authorized by God - **Colossians 3:17**). Paul and Barnabas did not differ over matters of obligation, but over optional matters.

Regarding the “sharp contention” that resulted in the two men parting company, there is no evidence that either one of these two great servants of God sinned in motive or action (**1 John 3:4; James 4:17**). In fact, after their separation the church in Antioch of Syria backed them (**Acts 15:40**). Out of their difference in judgment, two preaching tours emerged. Hence, unity, oneness, or sameness must obtain in all matters of obligation, and diversity or difference is allowed in those matters where God did not specify who, where, when, and/or how the thing authorized is to be done.

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In local church matters elders make the final decision in optional matters (**Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:7, 17; 1 Peter 5:1-3**). Elders, do you know the difference in obligatory and optional matters? If so, do you know that you are to choose the option that expedites or is most advantageous (without the element of advantage a thing cannot be expeditious) in doing what God in His Word has obligated the church to do? When elders do not know these things, only confusion can result. If the church today does not evidence the fact that most elders do not know the aforementioned matters, then we do not know what it would take to prove it.

Today, those who advocate “unity in diversity” are trying to teach doctrines that are designed to make obligatory things optional. They teach that you can “opt” to observe the Lord’s Supper on Sunday or any other day. If it violates your conscience or if it is against your “tradition” to take it on Thursday night, then do not do it, but do not divide the church over your differences. If you must not use mechanical instruments of music in worship to God, fine. Just do not separate yourselves from those who do. In fact, just about everything that God has obligated man to do by His authoritative will has been dealt with in the above erroneous manner. The result is that false doctrines are taught which loose men from what God in the Bible has bound upon them (various forms of “liberalism”) and bound men with what God in His Word has not bound upon them (various forms of “anti-ism”).

There can be no God-approved or true unity that is not founded on and sustained by Bible authority. We readily see the need of properly constituted authority in the everyday affairs of life.