

Church - Christian Unity

How must the church deal with false unifiers?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones so Biblically put it, "Truth and untruth cannot be reconciled, and the difference between them cannot be patched over. Error is always to be exposed and denounced for truth's sake, and also, as we have seen, for the sake of babes in Christ."

In our current series of questions and answers we are discussing critical aspects of the issue of Christian unity — how to achieve and maintain it, and just as importantly, how *not* to do it. We are using Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' landmark 1962 speech to a British ministerial fellowship as our outline.

Truth and Untruth Cannot Be Reconciled

Thus far, we have seen that unity is not the church's first concern; unity is not to be found in the visible church; and, unity is only to be found in regeneration by the Holy Spirit and unwavering belief in the fundamentals of the faith. Dr. Lloyd-Jones next turned to the question of how to deal with those who will not submit to the truth, and seek to manufacture unity on some other basis:

6. To do anything which supports or encourages such an impression or appearance of unity [apart from firm loyalty to Biblical truth] is surely dishonest and sinful. Truth and untruth cannot be reconciled, and the difference between them cannot be patched over. Error is always to be exposed and denounced for truth's sake, and also, as we have seen, for the sake of babes in Christ. This is also important from the standpoint of the statement in John

17:21, "that the world may believe that thou hast sent Me." Nothing so surely drives the world away from the truth as uncertainty or confusion in the church with respect to the content of her message.

That is undoubtedly the main cause of the present declension in religion.

The Fruits of Uncertainty About the Truth

Dr. Lloyd-Jones rightly said that uncertainty and confusion will drive the world away from the *truth*. *And it is often just as true that such uncertainty and confusion about the church's message will actually draw the world to the visible church.* Today, mega-churches that stand for little more than psychological self-affirmation draw multiplied thousands to their services, and millions on television. It is the lack of a Biblical stand on the fundamentals that actually facilitates much of the mega-church phenomenon. It is quite easy to build a false unity by focusing on externals, and telling people what they want to hear. The Apostle Paul said this would be true in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 —

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears [Greek *knethemonoi*, they want to hear something that pleases them], they will heap up for themselves teachers [literally, accumulate teachers in piles]; and they will turn their ears away from the truth [the picture in the original is "they will betray allegiance to the truth"], and be turned aside to fables [Greek *mythos*, literally, stories].

This is certainly true in the 21st century Evangelical church. Many people come to church, listen to religious radio, or watch church television programs merely to hear what they want to hear. As long as they hear what pleases them they will keep coming or stay tuned. But when they don't, they go somewhere else or change the station. Thus, they "pile up" teachers — and confusion — for themselves. And thus,

they are turned aside from the faithful exposition of the Word of God to stories. Many preachers today are poor expositors of Scripture, but excellent story-tellers.

But, Dr. Lloyd-Jones continued, while such churches may draw a crowd for a time, the world at large will see through the charade:

The world will not be impressed by a mere coming together in externals while there is central disagreement about the fundamentals of the faith. It will interpret it as an attempt on the part of church authorities to save their institution in much the same way as it sees business men forming combines and amalgamations with the same object and intention. The question the world is still asking is, What is Christianity? What is your teaching? Have you anything authoritative and powerful to offer us?

Sadly, too often today the answer is, No. Witness, for example, the recent deep and sinful compromise of Evangelical leaders such as Rick Warren, Joel Osteen, and a former leader of the National Association of Evangelicals on the issue of homosexual "marriage."

Commands Concerning False Unifiers

How is the church to deal with such false unifiers? Scripture gives us these imperatives:

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen [the idea in the original is "someone who is an alien to the true worship of God"] and a tax collector [in the Authorized Version, "publican" — a Jew who

collected taxes for Rome while at the same time overcharging to line his own pockets, and thus was considered the worst sort of traitor by the Jews; the metaphor is that a person who refuses Biblical correction should be treated as a traitor to the faith]. (Matthew 18:15-17)

I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses [which is what such false unifiers are actually doing], contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly [Greek *koilia*, fleshly desires], and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple [Greek *akakōn*, literally, the innocent].....I want you to be wise [Greek *sophous*, skillful in discernment] in what is good, and simple [Greek *akeraious*, uncompromised] concerning evil. (Romans 16:17-19)

Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds. (2 John 9-11)

Debate the Fundamentals?

Is a church the place to discuss or debate the fundamentals of the faith, as though they were open to question? The immediate response of the Scripture-driven church is, No! But in Martyn Lloyd-Jones' day and ours as well, such discussion takes place in the Evangelical church, with devastating results. In our [next article](#) in this series, we shall see Dr. Lloyd-Jones' response to this un-Biblical phenomenon.

References:

1. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Basis of Christian Unity," in Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942-1977 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 162.

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Scripture shows that making membership or participation in a visible body the basis of Christian unity is dangerous.

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