

Unity in Christ

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Recently in my personal and group study of the Bible I have been continually reminded of the importance of understanding God's work in Christ. As we gain insight into the work of God through the New Testament writings we come to understand God's ultimate purposes for man, spiritual principalities and powers as well as creation itself - all of which are bound up in Christ. Exposure to such marvelous knowledge, through the Scriptures, helps us to better understand our privileged position of being God's chosen people in Christ.

It is God's will that by understanding His work in Christ we will be better equipped to fulfill our role as believers in God's great plan. Ephesians sums up well the purposes of God.

He (God) has made known to us his secret purpose in accordance with the plan which he determined beforehand in Christ, to be put into effect when the time was ripe: namely, that the universe, everything in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ (Eph. 1:9-10 NEB).

Here the fulfillment of God's plan for the entire universe is said to be taking place in Christ. It is obvious that this plan is yet to be fully realized, for no one can deny that all things in heaven and on earth are not unified. But God has already acted in Christ to ensure that this unity will be accomplished.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Col. 1:19-20 NIV).

There are different dimensions within this reconciling process. Enmity abounds within God's creation on many different levels. First, mankind, in addition to being alienated from God (Col. 1:21), is divided against itself. Second, there are hostile forces within the heavenlies that must be brought to subjection before unity can be achieved.

Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph. 6:11-12 NIV)

Third, in addition to all this the creation itself "groans as in the pains of childbirth" waiting to be "liberated from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:19-22). Thankfully, God's work in Christ is sufficient to deal effectively with all these problems. We ourselves, as God's chosen people in Christ, have an important role to play in the outworking of this reconciling and unifying plan.

In dealing with man, God's work had to change the position in which we stood towards Himself and one another. He did this in Christ. God's message to the world is that,

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them... We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (II Cor. 5:19-21 NIV).

And if we have been reconciled or brought to God then it stands true that there should no longer be divisions among mankind.

For he (Christ) himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Eph. 2:14-18 NIV).

Although this section speaks specifically to the division of Jew and Gentile, which was of utmost importance for biblical times, it is also true for all men everywhere. For,

here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all (Col. 3:11 NIV).

As men and women who have been brought to the side of God where “Christ is all and is in all” there is no longer any room for divisions; instead, the way to unity has been revealed.

Though there is probably a great deal that man does not know about spiritual powers, we do know that their function does not lay outside of God’s purposes in Christ. It is “all things in heaven and on earth” that will be brought into a unity in Christ. God has,

seated him (Christ) at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Eph. 1:20-23 NIV).

God has also given Christ’s church a mediatorial role to play in displaying his wisdom to these heavenly powers.

His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made

known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:10-11 NIV).

The eternal purpose of unifying all things can be seen as already accomplished in part within the church. This unity is the design for all of God’s creation and when the “rulers in the heavens” look upon the unified people of God in Christ, God’s wisdom in accomplishing unity is revealed to them.

But God’s design for creation is not separate from His design for man. As Paul stated,

In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed ... that the creation itself might be freed from its slavery to corruption and brought into the same glorious freedom as the children of God (Rom. 8:18-21 NJB)

When God’s goal for man is reached and His children in Christ are finally “revealed” the creation itself will be freed from corruption and will be made fitting for the scene of God’s rule. What a glorious day that will be! May we as God’s children “wait” for this day “patiently” (Rom. 8:25) - with steadfast faith, hope and love - as we serve our God in the unity in Christ to which we have been called.