

The Importance of Joyful Unity in Church Revitalisation

Unity and uniformity are not the same thing! Often, churches in need of revitalisation have substituted uniformity for joyful, biblical unity – and they don't know it. A church that is mired in uniformity will find revitalisation and numerical growth to be difficult or impossible. As biblically driven leaders, we are responsible to lead God's people do the hard work necessary to learn and practice joyful, biblical unity. Joyful unity teaches us humility, amplifies our gospel witness, and facilitates revitalisation in a church.

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- I. Introduction
- II. Unity and uniformity are not the same thing (Romans 12:4-8; I Corinthians 12:12-31)
 - A. Uniformity assumes that people in a church will think alike on most theological and cultural values.
 - B. Unity assumes that people in a church will *not* think alike on every theological and cultural value – and yet, because of Jesus and the gospel, we will joyfully love each other, despite our differences.
 - C. Church members may not see the difference between uniformity and unity, but guests to our fellowship will quickly sense the difference. *Revitalisation takes place best in the presence of joyful unity, not uniformity.*
- III. We must be EAGER to grow in unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)
 - A. Ephesians is a letter about God's “mystery” – the Church – the body of Christ. Paul teaches us about what the Church is, and about how followers of Christ should live.
 - B. A core issue: All true Christians are placed into the body of Christ when they trust Christ as their Savior; this is true regardless of denomination, ethnicity, family background, past failures, etc.

- C. Joyful unity means that we embrace differing functions, differing passions, differing specialties, and even different perspectives on non-essential issues (I did not say, “non-important”). God’s people view life through countless lenses, including political, economic, prophetic, medical, Biblical, conspiracy, cultural...
- IV. We must TEACH, PRACTICE, and PURSUE unity out of love for Christ and love of others (John 17:20-23; Romans 14:1-12). *Revitalisation requires this.*
- A. NOTE the key phrase: “Let not the one who _____ despise the one who _____.” This addresses our attitudes toward other people who see things differently than we do.
 - B. BEWARE of the idea that “All smart Jesus-loving people think like I do,” or “If that person would only read THIS article or social media post or book, then that person would think like I do,” or “It is my job to convince others to think like me.” This kind of thinking hinders revitalisation!
- V. Practical suggestions
- A. TEACH principles of unity and Biblical diversity even when there are no pressing issues. Every church or mission agency or group of Christians needs to have the pursuit of joyful unity as part of their “organisational DNA.”
 - B. APPLY these principles every chance you get. Potentially divisive topics include political parties (lean to the right or lean to the left?), racial and ethnic controversies (who do YOU associate with and who gets the most attention from your ministry?), use of alcohol (some cultures say yes, others say no), use of money (how much is too much and how do you spend it?), and other topics that are typically driven by culture and denominational background.
 - C. LEAD your church or organization by example. Leaders should lead in this.
 - D. GUARD against threats to unity! Invite your congregation or group to follow you in...
 - i. Speaking well of those we differ with, and NOT talking badly about those on the “other side.” As a leader, you must guard what you express publicly. Make sure your first allegiance is to God’s Kingdom, not to your own opinions.
 - ii. Refraining from posting argumentative or divisive material on social media! You must guard your “voice” – that is, if you use your online presence to address needless or secondary topics, you will lose your ability to lead those

who disagree with you.

- iii. Listening to other opinions without an argumentative spirit. You might learn something.

VI. To discuss or think about:

- A. In my cultural context, what are the “hot topics” that people are talking about that could easily bring disunity to the body of Christ where I serve? How can I encourage joyful unity?
- B. How does joyful unity create an atmosphere in which revitalisation can thrive?