

The Ideal: The Biblical Pattern Of Unity - Response to A Paper Presented By Dr. William Turner

By Bishop Barbara Amos

If the Church is to be an effective and viable force in revealing God to the world, it is crucial that we seriously examine our call to unity. Only through precept and example will the unity message will be revealed to the world.

Amidst the many books, articles, seminars, lecture series, and discussions relative to the subject of unity, we often find application restrictive and selective. We can readily see and experience division and stratification on various levels in the Church.

In an effort to move toward racial reconciliation in the Pentecostal Movement, it is imperative that the message of Ephesians 4:3, "Endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," move from the pages of the Bible into our hearts for honest and practical application. In an effort to actualize any goal, it is expedient that we have somewhat clear definition of terms. For the purpose of this writing, we cite unity as "oneness of sentiment, affection, or behavior." More explicitly, we cite unity of the Spirit as "oneness of Christians among themselves, united under the same Head, having the same Spirit dwelling in them;" one Spirit present to unite many persons for one purpose. The presence of the Spirit of the Lord will bring about this oneness when He has dominion in the lives of Christians. As the Spirit of God continues to lead and guide us into all truth, we realize clearly the mandate for unity.

According to the dictionary, unity usually exists in a close junction of parts constituting a body. The body of Christ has many members, each providing unique, specific functions and contributions to the Body's existence. God, in His infinite wisdom and power, removed from individual parts of the Body the luxury of total independence and autonomy. Each member is directly dependent upon Christ the Head for life and direction. All of the members are interdependent, relying on one another to aid in productivity or to provide specialized function for the benefit of the entire Body.

The oneness to which we refer is sensitive to the diversity within the body of Christ. This sensitivity recognizes that each member is unique, meaningful, and purposeful to the accomplishment of God's purposes. The term unity implies and validates that diversity exists; otherwise, the term would be nonexistent.

God strategically placed diversity within the one Body with many members; nonetheless, we have used these diversities to create divisions. When we become appreciative of diversity as God's expression of creativity, we will then see members of the Body fitly joined together as a whole in spite of obvious diversities.

Essential to the integrity of the Church is our ability to demonstrate the oneness that is a result of the unifying Spirit of God. Our desire for oneness must transcend race, gender, class, age, and a variety of other concerns that have negated our message of unity. Indifference, intolerance, feelings of superiority, and subjugation of others different from ourselves, are not acceptable actions when claiming unity of the Spirit. We must never consciously or unconsciously perceive ourselves as an "elitist" group upon which divine favor has been bestowed. In taking this pharisaic approach, we adorn ourselves with the false shield of self-righteousness. Christ alone is the Head of the Church. Instead of being called to oneness, we tend to exemplify the attitude of being called to be "the one."

It is crucial that we cease to validate and authenticate those around us by relegating them to conformity to our norms, our standards, and our traditions. The freedom of expression and the need to be creative are stifled and our lives become dull, void, and inanimate. We are deprived of the meaningful contributions of others when we are receptive and appreciative of only those who are "like us" or those who "do as we do." The Spirit of God cannot be contained or limited to any special interest groups. Christ alone is the standard. The integrity of the Church will be substantiated when it undeniably exhibits an appreciation for diversification. All of our divisions are outside of Christ. He is not in our midst under such conditions. We have concurred with these statements with our lips through the centuries. We have preached sermons and engaged in eloquent dialogue about unity while the Church remains one of the most segregated institutions in the world. After all the theological and intellectual debates, we must not fail at simple practical application.

How then shall we live?

We must endeavor to:

- Allow the Holy Spirit to have complete control over our hearts and lives.
- Make a conscious effort to destroy the barriers that foster division and hinder the flow of the Spirit; even when these barriers may be fortified by time or tradition.
- Be prepared to know that God does not stand with those who are the majority, but He stands with those who are righteous.

We must endeavor to keep:

- Preeminent God's perfect will, standing fast in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free.
- Open and honest communication.

We must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit:

- As we allow the Holy Spirit free course and total reign within the hearts of those of us who profess His presence.
- As we fully embrace mankind in the spirit of love and humility.

The work of the Holy Spirit in empowering the life of the believer has been an intricate part of the Pentecostal experience. As Pentecostals we have a special appreciation for special gifts. We are proponents of being filled with the Holy Ghost. We acknowledge the endowment of spiritual gifts. We operate in these gifts ourselves. However, while we concede to the work of the Holy Spirit, we are at issue with who the Spirit uses. The gifts of the Spirit can be effective only when operating in truth. Racial reconciliation in the Pentecostal Movement will occur when diversity of gifts, talents, and ministry style caused by cultural and/or ethnic differences are accepted as complimentary or extensions to the Body and not divisive.

Racial reconciliation in the Pentecostal Movement will occur when the words "by one blood did all nations come into existence" become more than an expression of spiritual rhetoric. God in His sovereignty could have birthed the nations of the world with blood unique to various groups, but His infinite desire for oneness would have been compromised. The clear intent of God for unity in the body of Christ mandates that the Pentecostal Movement lead the collective charge in establishing a new agenda as we endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.