



COMING TOGETHER AROUND A COMMON BIBLICAL VISION



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EDITORIAL

IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE for God's people to work together in unity for the sake of God's glory in all the earth and the spread of His kingdom to all peoples? If you look at Christian history over the last 2,000 years, you would fairly conclude that it is not. But things are changing in our day and the unity that we need that seems so impossible to achieve is more and more becoming the reality on the mission field.

In his "High Priestly Prayer" of John 17, Jesus prayed for his disciples and for us, those who would believe as a result of his first disciples, that we would be one so that the world would know that Jesus was sent from God and that we are loved by God. In verses 22 and 23 Jesus prayed to the Father for us, "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you

sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

I believe that this prayer is in the process of being answered in our day. As this issue of MF describes in detail, the global mission community is increasingly coming together in networks and partnerships. There is the growing realization that the task is too big for any one organization to tackle and so much more can be accomplished by working together than can be done separately.

So what would the "complete unity" Jesus prayed for look like anyway? It will not be characterized by a large organization with a hierarchical command and control structure. The clear trend in both church and mission is towards a decentralization of power and control and a move towards the kinds of voluntary networks and partnerships described in this issue. First of all, we have the unity of partaking of the same Holy Spirit. As followers of Jesus each of us is united in the Spirit. Beyond this, the unity Jesus prayed for will be a unity of vision and purpose where God's people live on mission with Him in obedience to His word to do

His will in His ways in the power of the Holy Spirit. We have been given our marching orders in Matt. 28:18-20 to go and make disciples who make more disciples and to do so in all peoples. The closer we get as the global church to abiding in Jesus and obeying what He has called us to do, the more unified we will be as His body—no matter how many moving parts that body may have. Disunity comes from a lack of submission to the authority of Jesus and a failure to obey what He has commanded us to do. It comes from a desire to do things our way rather than His way. The more we rely on the flesh instead of obey the word, the more disunity there will be.

Over the last 27 years, I have experienced first hand the kind of unity Jesus prayed for as I have lived on mission with God. I have worked with Jesus followers from many different backgrounds. I did not have complete unity with these fine servants of God on every aspect of doctrine, mission strategy, politics and a host of other topics but there were always certain things that we were unified around. We loved Jesus and we wanted everyone else within all peoples to love him too, and we

were willing to give our lives to help make that a reality.

So What Is This Biblical Vision That Can Unite Us?

It really is not that complicated. As mentioned above, it is centered on simple obedience to what Jesus has asked all of us to do. Here are some suggestions based on what Scripture teaches.

1. We must provide access to the gospel and the knowledge of Christ to every person on earth. This sounds impossible but is actually doable if we focus on reaching every people group and fostering movements of discipleship in each one. If we employ the multiplication methods that Jesus modeled and Paul used until he could declare that there was “no place left” for him to work, (Rom. 15:23) then it is possible for every person to have access to the gospel. It is the power of exponential multiplication of disciples making disciples. It says in 2 Peter 3:9 that God is “not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Obviously, not all will believe, but all people everywhere deserve to have access.

2. Every willing follower of Jesus must be equipped (discipled) to live on mission with God to make more disciples who likewise equip and make more disciples. The “Great Commission” passage of Matt. 28:18-20 makes it clear that everyone who claims to be a Jesus follower is called to go and make disciples, “teaching them to obey all that I have commanded.” One of those commands is to make disciples so multigenerational discipleship is inherent in Jesus’

last words to us in this passage. Paul reinforces this multigenerational discipleship mandate in 2 Tim. 2:2 when he says to Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach other.” In this passage we can see four generations of disciples. Whatever method we decide to use to make disciples, we must ask ourselves whether it is successful in producing multiple generations of disciples.

3. The “Great Commission,” Matt. 28:18-20 must become our identity as followers of Jesus. Very few churches regularly teach Matt: 28:18-20 as representing the call of Jesus upon all of our lives. This foundation stone of who we are as Jesus followers is often mistakenly taught as something that applies to a few special called out ones rather than something all of us are obliged to obey. This idea that a few are called and most are not brings great disunity to the body of Christ. The regular and proper teaching of this passage would help greatly in bringing unity to the body of Christ as we work together on mission with God to make disciples and bring the gospel to every people. How can we say that Jesus is our King and we are part of His kingdom if we refuse to obey, not to mention teach, what our King has asked us to do?

4. We Must Love God and Love Our Neighbor In Matt. 22:37-40 Jesus said, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The

second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” How do we most effectively fulfill this commandment from Jesus? How do we love God with our whole being? Jesus has given us some clues. In John 14:21, “Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me.” In 1 John 2:5 it says, “But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him.” Love for God and obedience to what He has commanded are inseparable from each other. Our obedience is also key to loving our neighbor. The most loving thing we can ever do for someone is to share the gospel with them. In 1 Peter 1:22, it says, “Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

We can move ever closer to the complete unity that Jesus prayed for the more we are willing to obey what Jesus has asked us to do and to live on mission together with Him. 

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