

Why Not One?

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Jesus prayed, “My prayer is not for [the Twelve and the Seventy] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” (Jn. 17:20-21) Of all the prayers He prayed, this is the one about which we should most enquire, Why not? Why has this prayer remained unanswered? Why are we not all “one”? The answer to these questions has several aspects that we shall explore but let us hold this sobering thought before us as we explore these answers – until we display the oneness of which Christ prayed, we have no reason to expect the world to believe that Christ is the true and only way to find the Most High God. Evangelism is stymied, intercession is forestalled and preaching is crippled to the point of producing apostates rather than converts all by the rampant and uncontrolled divisions that exist among those who claim to follow Christ.

Over the centuries, many have tried to bring about a new unity, most often based on a return to or renewal of some “hidden” or “lost” truth from the Scriptures. This has always devolved into yet another division and has yet to produce the unity for which Christ prayed. Though the answers to the question, “Why not?” has several aspects to consider, the “bottom line” answer is that some work of man inserts itself into the work of God and the result is division and disunity. May God be merciful and deliver us from the hands of men, men we have most often ignorantly and ill-advisedly placed ourselves under.

Paul prophesied, “Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:30) Paul was speaking to a group of elders (Greek *presbuteros*) whom Paul also called overseers (Greek, *episkopas*, traditionally “bishop” – Acts 20:17, 28) This is precisely what occurred in what men commonly call church history. From the group of men recognized to disciple by example and watch over the flock (1 Pet. 5:2-3) arose men who took the title of bishop and created an *office* whereby they presided *over* the assembly – in spite of Jesus’ clear instruction, “It shall not be so among you...” (Mt. 20:25-26, etc.) Though councils and synods were held to maintain a visible and doctrinal “unity,” ultimately the unity was based on which bishop had the most followers and wielded the most power. The Roman bishop, in part because Rome was also the seat of civic power, ended up on top of the heap and took upon himself the titles of “pope” (father) and “vicar” (personal and infallible representative) of Christ and “pontifex maximus” (a title taken straight from the Roman empire which means “highest bridge or mediator between God and men) – in spite of the fact that the New Testament reserves these places for Christ and the Holy Spirit alone. (Mt. 23:9, Jn. 16:15, 1 Tim. 2:5, etc.) The Spirit of truth was followed – but only after councils and synods of men had placed their stamp of approval on what they said He was saying. The Holy Spirit has progressively led by proxy ever since. This “delegated authority” over the people is precisely what Jesus called “Nicolaitan,” a thing which He hates but has tolerated for 2,000 years so that the tares could fully ripen right next to the wheat. (Rev. 2:6, 15, Mt. 13:30)

When the Roman bishop had ruled over the people of Christ for more than a millennia and the corruption was unmistakable and intolerable, men began to question (and to survive doing so!) the idea of Romish rule. Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer and many others rose up to accomplish what history calls the Reformation. Romish rule was cast off for those who called themselves Protestants but, especially in America, many various denominations arose as many “bishops” (most often called “pastors”) drew followers

after themselves or their particular sect's (denomination's) distinctive teachings. Today there are literally thousands of such sects, heresies (Greek, *choosing*) and dissensions that men blithely call denominations – in spite of the fact that Paul warned that these things would keep their practitioners from inheriting the kingdom of God. (Gal. 5:19-21) Also ignored is Paul's warning that those who claimed to be followers of men could only be fleshly or carnal (1 Cor. 3:3-4) – and carnality can only be viewed as enmity against God. (Rom. 8:7-8) Thus has been precisely fulfilled Peter's prophecy that men would stealthily introduce destructive or dangerous divisions (Greek, *heresies, choosing*) that would nullify the Lordship of Christ. (2 Pet. 2:1)

Jesus had warned that men would sleep while His enemy planted seeds that would become the children of the devil living and growing right among the wheat. (Mt. 13:28-30, 38-39) He also said that both the wise and foolish wedding maids would fall asleep. (Mt. 25:5) Paul spoke of the need to be aware of Satan's schemes "in order that Satan might not outwit us" (2 Cor. 2:11) and Peter spoke of the need to remain self-controlled, alert, vigilant and wary against a prowling adversary who seeks to devour us as prey. (1 Pet. 5:8) Men have failed to see the primary schemes of the devil and the demonic that have lured men into positions of power and preeminence that have divided the people of Christ. It is precisely because men "slept" that the enemy has gained great power and advantage over the people of Christ. Ultimately, the "gates" (demonic devices, prison doors to keep in the captives and keep out the light and hope of liberty in Christ) of death and darkness will not prevail over Christ's true wheat, His ekklesia, His people called out of darkness to attend to His kingdom of light. (Mt. 16:18) In the end, church history will most resemble the life of Samson, the mighty man of valor who wasted his strength in his compromised lifestyle yet in the end takes out more enemies when he sacrifices himself. (Jdgs. 16:30, etc.) Hear again Delilah's taunting cry, "Samson, the Philistines are upon you!" (Jdgs. 16:12, etc.) Blessed indeed will be those whose individual lives do not conform to the pattern of this world – Jesus calls them "overcomers" and promises them great rewards. (Rev. 2:7, etc.) In the end, we will finally overcome all the schemes and strategies of the devil "by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of [our] testimony and [we] did not love [our] lives so much as to shrink from death." (Rev. 12:11)

The schemes of the devil – the installation of the office of the Nicolaitan bishop ("pastors"), the luring of men into various sects and divisions (denominations), the various worldly philosophies adopted in many "Christian" circles, etc. – will culminate in what is called "the apostasy" or "the great falling away from the faith." (Mt. 24:10, 2 Ths. 2:3) A careful reading of the prophecies regarding this large scale, worldwide "event" (in truth a movement or over-arching trend) shows that it is rooted among the people who claim to follow Christ and God. (2 Tim. 3:5, etc.) One of the key characteristics of the apostasy is that of a great number of teachers who soothe and stimulate ears as they draw followers after themselves and teach people to disregard sound teaching and content themselves with fables. (2 Tim. 4:3-4) The multitudes of teachers are patterned after the sermonizing aspects of the Nicolaitan bishop, complete with all the trappings of pagan Greek sophistry, eloquence and rhetoric (homiletics, hermeneutics, persuasive structure, etc. all have pagan roots) that is very different from the words of the Holy Spirit delivered by His power. (1 Pet. 4:11, 1 Cor. 2:1-5, etc.) And each of these teachers, just as does the Nicolaitan bishop ("pastor" or "senior pastor"), claims that he has a special anointing from God that enables and entitles him (or her) to speak down to the crowds who seat themselves at his feet. Thus is Jesus' prophecy precisely fulfilled that *many* would come in His name claiming to be "the anointed one" and deceiving *many*. (Mt. 24:5)

The prominent characteristic of the end of the age is what the better English translations have termed “lawlessness.” (Mt. 24:11) The Greek word (*anomia*) means “without law” and it denotes one who has no standard, apart from himself and his own desires, by which to regulate his conduct and life. The Old Testament spoke of the time when Israel had no king as a time when “every man did what was right in his own eyes.” (Jdgs. 21:25) Modern philosophers teach this concept under the label relativism and the multitude of bishops (“pastors”), teachers and sects (denominations, dissensions and heresies) is possible only because they cater to and build upon the personal tastes, whims and desires of their followers. The lawless follower, seeking to avoid outright and obvious evil and wickedness, chooses the “church” he, in his own estimation, thinks best represents the “God” he wants to follow. Thus is precisely fulfilled Jude’s prophecy that men would take the way of Cain, the way of fallen, fleshly, cursed religion that blindly expects to receive God’s approval anyway. (Jude 11, Gen. 4:3-5)

It is indeed instructive to note that *all* of the important prophecies regarding *how* the oneness for which Christ prayed have been obscured over time by *human tradition*. If men had not been “asleep,” the plain meanings of the prophecies would have leaped out at them and church history would be very different from what it is now.

Why are we not “one”? Why has Christ’s High Priestly prayer for the unity of His people, which is to be like the unity of the Father and the Son, not been produced for 2,000 years? We can now give three basic answers:

- Men - *we* - have not submitted to the genuine Headship of Christ but have instead preferred unrighteous means and methods to practice in His name what is right in our own eyes.
- Men - *we* - have submitted to men’s agendas that are driven by demonic notions and schemes that are systematically designed to prevent the unity of Christ’s body.
- Men - *we* - have chosen to obey our own self or our own chosen “man of God for the hour” rather than seat ourselves at the feet of the Master, learn from Him, take up our cross, deny our self and follow Him wherever He leads us and through whatever form of death we must endure and overcome.

Why is the body of Christ not one? Because *we* stand in the way!

Let he who has ears hear.

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