

Why Does Unity Matter?

Recently I participated in a prayer conference that was nothing short of amazing—a conference that could not have happened perhaps even a decade ago. The Praying Church Conference, was sponsored by Doug Small and Prayer Alive Ministries, but was also co-sponsored by the Church of God (Cleveland) and held at the Church at Liberty Square (COG) in Cartersville, Georgia. More than 500 attended. What was so amazing about the event was that there were large numbers of participants from two vastly different denominations—Church of God and Southern Baptist—both in attendance and among the speaking line-up.

One of the evening events saw Doug interview a Southern Baptist pastor who had recently seen a significant move of God in his church. It was both powerful and fascinating to watch two leaders who would traditionally have had different views on what marked a move of God, highlighting and praising God for what He was doing among the other group.

Later Doug spoke about how we could be in unity with each other. He commented that there is a core theology that we all agree about—especially related to who Christ is, what He has done for us, and what our mission should be (reach lost people). But we all come from different tribes (in the same way the 12 tribes of Israel were different) with our own idiosyncrasies and emphases. The problem has been that we have too often taken those idiosyncrasies and emphases, and made them core theology. When that happens we won't fellowship together.

The Heart of Jesus

In one of the few recorded prayers we have of Jesus, He prayed specifically for unity of His future followers. "I pray they

may all be one, Father . . .” (John 17:21). Why did He want that? “Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (v. 23). First Timothy 2:1-4 indicates that God’s desire is for all men to be saved. That is the heart of Jesus, that people would be saved. And that happens best—according to Scripture—when His people are in unity, working, fellowshiping and praying together.

Looking historically at revival and spiritual awakening in the United States, a key element that launched those moves of God was unity. Churches started praying together, seeking God for their communities and nation. In the prayer meeting revival of the late 1850s, believers from many different churches started meeting in noontime prayer meetings across cities, not caring what “tribes” were there that they shouldn’t mingle with. That had a common goal and vision.

We have got to tear down those walls that divide the denominational (and non-denominational) tribes for the sake of the gospel. Pastors, we need to be less concerned about what intermingling might do to our theological purity and more concerned with what unity will do for the sake of lost souls.

A simple starting point would be to go to nationalprayeraccord.com and see how you can be involved in this unified prayer rhythm. Then look for ways to pray with pastors and believers from other tribes.

—Jonathan Graf is the publisher of Prayer Connect magazine.