

2. EVANGELICAL UNITY

Thesis: Christian oneness arises from God's gospel truth and never at the expense of it.

I. Pursuing Unity Through the Gospel

"Is Christ divided?" (1 Cor. 1:13).

"If evangelical belief is, in essence, gospel belief, how can Christian fellowship exist independently of any common commitment to such belief? How can evangelicalism be said to represent biblical essentials if one regards as Christians and works alongside those who actually deny these essentials?"¹

A. Genuine Unity Through the Gospel (source)

"And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them" (Jer. 32:38-39).

"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility...and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility" (Eph. 2:14-16).

"Our greatest need is not peace between human beings. It is peace between us and God. We need vertical reconciliation much more than horizontal reconciliation. This is what Jesus achieved on the cross. Out of that reconciliation has flowed our interpersonal reconciliation."²

"Now, therefore, if you will accept and submit to a truer definition of the church than yours, call it henceforth the assembly of all the saints, spread over the whole world, dispersed in every age, yet bound together by one doctrine of Christ and by one Spirit of Christ, holding and maintaining the unity of the faith with a brotherly concord and charity. Now we deny that we are at variance with this church; rather, honoring her as our mother, we wish to remain in her embrace."³

"An evangelical church is composed of a number of persons who have come to agreement in a certain message about Christ and who desire to unite in the propagation of that message, as it is set forth in their creed on the basis of the Bible."⁴

B. Genuine Unity According to the Gospel (standard)

"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7).

"If Christ has received us, are we to refuse fellowship to those whom Christ has received? If we place restraints upon our acceptance of believers, we are violating the example of that redemptive action upon which all fellowship in the church rests."⁵

¹ Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 45.

² Conrad Mbewe, *Unity: Striving Side by Side for the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 22.

³ John Calvin quoted in Jacob T. Hoogstra ed., *John Calvin: Contemporary Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 119.

⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1923), 142.

⁵ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:203-4.

II. Pursuing Unity at the Expense of the Gospel

“Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (Jn. 17:17).

“The Protestant world will soon be educated to set inordinate store by that of which God makes least account—formal union; at the expense of that which he regards as of supreme value—doctrinal fidelity.”⁶

“...the ecumenical movement is more concerned with unity than it is with truth.”⁷

A. Counterfeit Unity through Doctrinal Indifference

“...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:13-14).

“Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

“Indifferentism about doctrine makes no heroes of the faith.”⁸

“There are two false remedies [to church division] which we need to beware of. One is a rigid and inflexible uniformity, and the other is an unbridled acceptance of all sorts of ideas and practices.”⁹

B. Counterfeit Unity through Damning Indifference

“If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9).

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting” (2 Jn. 10).

“The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan.”¹⁰

“The gospel should be the dividing line for this unity. Where there is a seriously defective understanding of the gospel, we cannot with good conscience forge unity.”¹¹

“If the gospel recovered at the Reformation is the truth, then love for the souls of men and women warrants a division now as it did then.”¹²

“They [the Reformers] were far from regarding themselves as heretics, schematics or sectarians. Among their deepest convictions was the assurance that they were the perpetuators of the catholic church of which Rome had become the betrayer.”¹³

⁶ Robert L. Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological* (London: Banner of Truth, 1967), 2:538.

⁷ E. J. Carnell, “Orthodoxy and Ecumenism” in *Christianity Today* (September 1, 1958), 17.

⁸ Machen, *Christianity & Liberalism*, 42.

⁹ Anthony Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity*, ed. Matthew Vogan (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 65.

¹⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith 25.5.

¹¹ Mbewe, *Unity*, 54.

¹² Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided*, 243 (writing about Evangelicals and Catholics Together).

¹³ John T. McNeill, *Unitive Protestantism: The Ecumenical Spirit and Its Persistent Expression* (Richmond: John Knox, 1964), 63.