

## 4. ECLECTIC UNITY

*Thesis: Christian oneness is not uniformity or unanimity but is enriched by diversity.*

### I. Diversity is Not Opposed to Oneness

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

*“Unity that comes to expression in uniformity may well be, and usually is, superficial. On the other hand, unity that constitutes the background of multiformity is necessarily deep. For us to be at one with those who are like us is easy; to be at one with those who are unlike us is possible only if a profound unity underlies surface differences.”<sup>1</sup>*

#### A. Diversity in a Single Body

“There is one body and one Spirit...” (Eph. 4:4).

*“The whole marvel and mystery of the human body is that, while it consists of so many different parts, all with their various functions, they are all one; they are bound together in a vital manner.”<sup>2</sup>*

#### B. Diversity in a Single Building

“...in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph. 2:22).

*“The people of God are compared to living stones built up together: while the stones remain in the building, they support one another, but if they are removed, it falls down.”<sup>3</sup>*

#### C. Diversity in a Single Family/Nation

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God...” (Eph. 2:19).

### II. Diversity as an Opportunity for Oneness

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7).

*“The biblical concept is unity and diversity, or perhaps unity in diversity...Biblical diversity is a positive, not a negative.”<sup>4</sup>*

*“While diversity always poses a threat to unity, it should not be construed as always and only a threat. The source of differing gifts lies in the one God, and therefore they may never rightly be grounds for divisions in the church but rather opportunities for a richer and more nuanced unity.”<sup>5</sup>*

---

<sup>1</sup> R. B. Kuiper, *The Glorious Body of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 45.

<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity*, ed. Matthew Vogan (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 40.

<sup>4</sup> David Murray, “The Unity and Diversity of Christ’s Beautiful Bride,” in *The Beauty & Glory of Christ’s Bride* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2015), 41, 48. Murray sets forth the following forms of diversity in the church: gender, age, intellect, vocation, ability, and nationality.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Lints, *Uncommon Unity: Wisdom for the Church in an Age of Division* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2022), 146.

## A. Diversity of Gifts/Roles

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7).

*“Scripture unity is one which keeps the order and distinction God has appointed. Indeed, we should greatly emphasize this point in case, under the pretense that all the people of God are one, we should introduce confusion, and make Christ’s body a horrendously deformed monster. Though the church is the one body of Christ, yet in it there are distinct members, and all have their different roles.”<sup>6</sup>*

## B. Diversity of Perspectives/Experiences

“Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them...And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other” (Acts 15:37-39).

*“When two people come into conflict, they bring with them a contrasting set of perspectives informed by their respective pasts. Their personal history is very much alive. It operates in ways that they themselves may not recognize, let alone the person with whom they have clashed....Theology does truly matter. But as we have seen, so does biography. It is impossible to separate how we think from what we have experienced; the waters are muddied.”<sup>7</sup>*

## C. Diversity of Convictions/Emphases

“One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables” (Rom. 14:2).

*“...the churches of the New Testament were filled with differences and disagreements, just like yours and mine. They emerged from their own culture wars (Jew and Gentile). They came from opposite ends of society (slave and free, rich and poor). They arrived at opposing moral convictions (drinking wine, eating meat). In the New Testament, these disagreements weren’t all resolved, and these differences weren’t all repudiated....For these first Christians, love amidst differences and disagreements revealed the power of being united in Christ alone.”<sup>8</sup>*

*“Wisdom discerns the differences that enrich the unity and the differences that undermine the unity.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“We only impoverish ourselves when we limit our Christian interaction to those within our churches and denominations.”<sup>10</sup>*

---

<sup>6</sup> Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity*, 60-1.

<sup>7</sup> Tim Cooper, *When Christians Disagree: Lessons from the Fractured Relationship of John Owen and Richard Baxter* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 29, 57.

<sup>8</sup> Jamie Dunlop, *Love the Ones Who Drive You Crazy: Eight Truths For Pursuing Unity In Your Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 2-3.

<sup>9</sup> Lints, *Uncommon Unity*, 253.

<sup>10</sup> Conrad Mbeve, *Unity: Striving Side by Side for the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2024), 82.