

8. UNIFYING WITNESS

Thesis: Christian oneness is deployed in mission to the world.

“Has anything in the world done more to lose our authority and disable us for God’s service, than our differences and divisions?”¹

I. Missional Unity in Biblical Theology

A. World-Oriented Oneness Renounced by Adam

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28).

B. World-Oriented Oneness Revealed to Abram

“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing...and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:2-3).

C. World-Oriented Oneness Relinquished by Israel

“Behold, I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon and will give you ten tribes...because they have forsaken me...” (1 Kgs. 11:31-32).

“I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’” (Ezek. 36:19-20).

D. World-Oriented Oneness Realized in Christ and His Church

“Behold, I will take the people of Israel from the nations among which they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and bring them to their own land. And I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. And one king shall be king over them all, and they shall be no longer two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms...Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forever” (Ezek. 37:21-22, 28).

“It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserve of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Is. 49:6).

II. Missional Unity in Practical Theology

A. Supplicating for World-Oriented Oneness

“I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you send me and loved them even as you loved me” (Jn. 17:23).

¹ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, 2nd ed. (London: Epworth Press, 1950), 124.

“Bless this our beloved church: keep them still in unity and earnestness of heart. In all fresh advances that we hope to make, be with us and help us.”²

“We can pray that separated churches having a similar basic stance will have a unitive conscience, and will move toward organic union with one another where this is practically possible and most helpful for their mission and the church at large.”³

B. Shining with World-Oriented Oneness

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn. 13:35).

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:14-16).

“The communities of God, to which Christ has become teacher and guide, are, in comparison with communities of the pagan people among whom they live as strangers, like heavenly lights in the world.”⁴

“The experience of this loving, accepting community of believers is an easily underestimated dynamic.”⁵

“I plead with you, therefore, if, or when that moment comes for you, that you find some way to show an observable love among true Christians before the world. Don’t divide into ugly parties. If you do, the world will see an ugliness which will turn it off.”⁶

“The necessity and desirableness of this union further appears in respect unto the world, who are allured unto Christ by it, and scared off from religion by the feuds and divisions of professors.”⁷

C. Sending in World-Oriented Oneness

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them” (Acts 13:1-2).

“We cannot proclaim the gospel of God’s love with any degree of integrity if we do not exhibit it in our love for others”⁸

“Unity among believers is a special means of enlarging the kingdom of Christ. Nothing gives quite so much obstruction to the gospel, and scandal to the world (keeping it away from faith in Christ), as seeing those who profess Christ divided and subdivided into many sects and opinions.”⁹

² Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Pastor in Prayer* (London: Elliot Stock, 1893), 143.

³ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1979), 332.

⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, III, 29.

⁵ Luder G. Whitlock Jr., *Divided We Fall: Overcoming a History of Christian Disunity* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 21.

⁶ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church Before the Watching World: A Practical Ecclesiology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1970), 79.

⁷ John Flavel, “A Sermon on Gospel Unity” in *Works* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), 3:597.

⁸ John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: An Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 256.

⁹ Anthony Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity*, ed. Matthew Vogan (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 84.