

Unity of Words

11/15/13

One of the ideals of the New Testament is the unity of all believers in Christ. Nowhere is this more apparent than in our Lord's prayer in John 17. In the hours just before His trials and crucifixion, Jesus prayed for us, His disciples who believe in Him through the word of His apostles. His petition on our behalf was for unity. Notice John 17:20-23:

²⁰"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;
²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²²The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; ²³I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

The Lord sought the highest level of unity among His believers. It is not enough for us to be alike in a few things, but rather we are to have a unity that compares to that of Christ with His Father. How can we achieve such unity?

Strangely, we can find a valuable lesson about unity from the division that occurred at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9. At that place in the land of Shinar, the people rebelled against God. God had commanded them to "fill the earth" (Gen. 9:1), but it was their ambition to make a name for themselves and prevent their scattering abroad over the face of the earth (Gen. 11:4). Notice that Genesis 11:1 says, "Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words." It was this unity of language and words that God disrupted in order to put down the people's rebellion and accomplish His purpose.

Consider Genesis 11:6-7:

⁶The LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.
⁷Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another's speech."

The result was that the people's ambitions were dashed because of the confusion of languages that arose at Babel, and God's purpose was fulfilled when they were scattered across the earth.

If the unity of the people at Babel was disrupted by the confusion of their language, then it should follow that Christians can find greater unity by speaking the same language. Concerning the people at Babel, God said, "Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language." If we would be one people in Christ, then it would behoove us to also have the same language. Indeed, this is God's intention for His people, that we should all speak the same way.

The unifying language of all Christians is not a single language like Greek or English, but rather it is a standard of words given by God. We are to "speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Tit. 2:1). These words and this doctrine are given by God through His inspired word, which we have in the Bible (1Cor. 2:6-13; 2Tim. 3:16-17). If all Christians resolve to speak and act according to the single standard of God's word, then we will have a unity that transcends this world. This is God's intention for us, which is clearly stated in 1Peter 4:11: "Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God..." Such words are more than mere utterances, but they are expressions of the true principles and values by which we are to live. Christians are told to "speak truth each one of you with his

neighbor, for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25). In this truth, we must be united just as Paul wrote in 1Corinthians 1:10: “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” Such unity of mind and judgment will be evident in the words we use as all Christians across the world speak the common language of God’s word. Christians in different nations may speak in different languages, but we will all have the same meanings from God’s word.

With such a unity of words, Christians can accomplish great things in the name of the Lord. God said that the unity of the rebellious people at Babel would have allowed them to accomplish anything, and therefore He divided them. If we unite under the single standard of God’s word, then the Lord has declared the effect that we will have: The world will know and believe that God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ (John 17:21, 23). This is our mission in this world, and we can start by speaking the same things through the word of God.

Stacey E. Durham