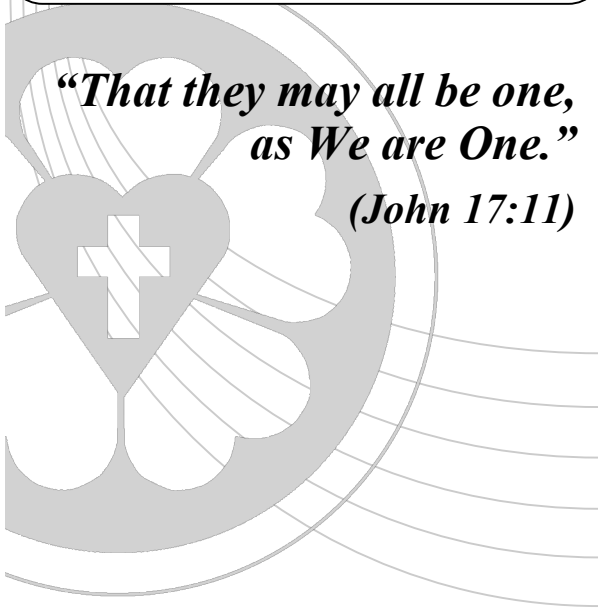


All of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:27-29)

***"That they may all be one,
as We are One."***

(John 17:11)



One in Christ

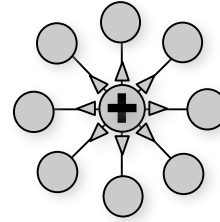
One of the promises often repeated in the New Testament is that the people of God are "one in Christ Jesus." We, who trust and believe in the one Lord, Jesus Christ, are knit together by God into one body, under one Father, by the work of the Holy Spirit.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

This unity in faith and spirit is not something that we create, but is something that God himself accomplishes in us.

Genuine Unity

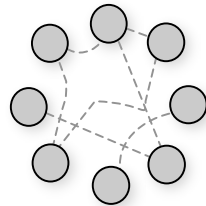
The unity that we have with each other in Christ is created by the common relationship we have with him. Like different siblings born to the same parents, we do not create our unity with one another; it comes from outside ourselves. In simple terms, we are only connected with one another because we are connected to Christ. Our common faith centers in him. As Martin Luther wrote in the Small Catechism:



In the same way, the Holy Spirit calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian Church on earth, keeping it united with Jesus Christ in one true faith.

False Human Unity

Many Christians often neglect this God-given unity in faith, by treating Christian unity as if it were something accomplished through our own efforts — through human organizations or institutions. Well-meaning "ecumenical agreements" and carefully drafted institutional documents replace a true unity in faith. When true agreement in faith is lacking, this often becomes little more than a vain effort to hold together human organizations, rather than an experience of genuine unity in Christ.



Institutional or organizational "unity" is quite a different matter from the unity we have in Christ. Simply being part of the same group, or being on the same church membership list as another person, does not create unity or peace. True Christian unity is found in a mutual connection with Christ that goes beyond groups and labels.

One in the Word

Jesus spoke of genuine Christian unity in what is known as his "High Priestly Prayer" on behalf of his disciples. Found in John, Chapter 17, Jesus' prayer for his original disciples — and for us — is that we would share his unity through faith in his Word. Note the references to God's Word and Truth in the text below:

Jesus prayed:

"Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

"I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

"I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one." (John 17:11-21)

When Jesus spoke of his disciples as "being one" with another, he said nothing about human organizations or institutions. Neither did he speak of unity being found in denominations, constitutions, or membership.

What he did speak of was unity in God's Word. His prayer was not simply that his disciples have a relationship with one another, but that they would be joined by a common belief in the truth he had revealed from the Father.

As Christians, we will not and cannot experience true fellowship with one another if we deny the truth of God's Word. As the Apostle John wrote in his first letter:

If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin ... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (1 John 1:6-10)

The Reality of Life in the Church

When people do not share the same faith in Christ, it should not be surprising to find divisions even among Christians. Even in the earliest days of Christianity, the Apostle Paul showed that he was no stranger to divisions in the Church.

When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you; and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. (1 Corinthians 11:17-19)

Note that Paul does not argue that divisions in the church are the way things *should* be, or that differences that exist among Christians are of no importance or are not "church dividing." Rather Paul argues that divisions are due to the fact that not all Christians share the same genuine faith.

Contrary to popular appeals that are made for "unity" in denominational institutions, there can be no real unity among members and congregations when a church body affirms mutually contradictory truths and does not teach in accordance with the Word of God.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Jesus said: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth ... that they may all be one." (John 17:17, 21)

Martin Luther spoke of true unity in faith when he wrote in the Small Catechism about a faith that is "in harmony" with God's Word. His words serve as a prayer much like that of Christ — that his disciples would live as one through a shared faith in God's Word:

God's name is hallowed whenever his Word is taught in its truth and purity and we as children of God live in harmony with it. Help us to do this heavenly Father!

May we seek not to reflect a false human unity, but the kind of unity that is established by God's Word and faith in Christ.

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To Be One in Christ Jesus



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Jesus prayed:

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(John 17:11 NRSV)