

VISITING EYES!

What Impression Do We Leave With Visitors?

Introduction

“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).



1. True, no one today speaks in tongues or prophecies in the Spirit (1 Corinthians 13:8-10), but we can still draw a lesson from what Paul says. If someone comes into the congregation and sees disorder and confusion, it is bound to leave them with a negative impression, but if they see order and decency, it will surely have a positive influence. Indeed, souls may be saved!
2. It is essential, though, first and foremost, to ensure that all we do in our worship service is according to what the scriptures teach (Colossians 3:17). If the worship service is according to the will of God, then we can be sure we will be setting forth an impression that God desires. But if we serve up what is termed “contemporary worship”, then we will only be setting forth that which appeals to the flesh.
3. This is not a sermon about the “acts of worship” but, rather, certain qualities whereby visitors can see the truth of the gospel in action. These are the four main points of the lesson:
 - a. Seeing love.
 - b. Seeing unity.
 - c. Seeing hope.
 - d. Seeing good works.

I. Seeing Love

Love without expression is not love (1 John 3:17).

1. The novelty of Jesus’ command to love:

- a. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). The Mosaic Law had said, “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18).
- b. So Jesus’ commandment is not new in the sense that love had never been commanded. Nor, as some believe, was it new in regards to degree: “even as I have loved you”. Meyer¹ explains, “The novelty lies rather in the motive power of the love, which must be the love of Christ, which one has experienced”. John wrote, “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).
- c. You can see that “brotherly love must be mutually determined and sustained by the personal experience of the love of Christ, or else it will be destitute of that which makes it peculiarly Christian in character” (Truth Commentaries, Daniel H. King, Sr.).



¹ Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer (10 January 1800 – 21 June 1873) was a German Protestant divine. He wrote commentaries on the New Testament and published an edition of that book.

2. There are three things that are worthless without expression:
 - a. Purifying one's self is the proof of hope (1 John 3:3; cp. 2 Corinthians 7:1).
 - b. Works are the proof of faith (James 2:18).
 - c. Servanthood is the proof of love (Galatians 5:13; cp. Mark 9:35).
3. Whenever the saints assemble, we would expect to see such love zealously expressed. Indeed, love is something visitors ought to notice and experience for themselves. Here are a few ways visitors witness our love:
 - a. We can demonstrate love toward visitors by giving them a warm welcome, honoring them, and including them in the service (inviting to pray, do a reading, etc.) (cp. James 2:2-4).
 - b. Visitors will see our love for God when we order our services according to His will (1 Corinthians 14:40), honor the Son (John 5:22-23), and offer our spirit filled worship (John 4:24; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
 - c. Visitors will see our love for one another as they observe our interactions with one another (1 Corinthians 12:26; 1 Peter 5:14; Romans 12:10). It is through our expressions of love for one another that visitors will know that we are true disciples of Christ (John 13:34-35).

The Importance Of Love Led Paul To...

- encourage churches to increase in love (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10).
- consider love as the "bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14).

II. Seeing Unity

A church that is walking in unity can have a positive effect on unbelievers and believers (John 17:20-23; 1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

1. Look at things from a non-Christian's point of view: they look at what they consider to be Christianity and see literally thousands of denominations and cults; each having their different creeds, organizational structures, ways of worship, etc. Surely we can understand why many sneer, scorn, and walk away in disgust?
2. Seeking unity:
 - a. Jesus prayed for unity (John 17:20-23) and Paul pleaded with the brethren at Corinth, saying, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Corinthians 1:10-13).
 - b. The early restorationists (e.g. Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell) sought to end denominationalism by pleading for a return to New Testament Christianity. While they had some success, they, quite obviously, didn't succeed in abolishing it.
 - c. Nevertheless, each congregation is to strive for unity (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) and continue the work of the restorationists in pleading for a return to New Testament Christianity.
3. The basis of unity:
 - a. Unity means to be "perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). One erroneous belief that is often resounded is, "We can't all understand the Bible alike". If this were true, then Paul's appeal would have been meaningless! But such things are only resounded to justify divisions.



Denominationalism is opposed to Jesus' prayer for unity (John 17:20-23), and every apologist for it is further promoting it. They also, no doubt, consider the apostle Paul a heretic for commanding unity in his epistles (1 Corinthians 1:10-13; Ephesians 4:1-6).

"All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32).

b. The basis of unity is not based on creeds or common denominators of all faiths. For example, the Catholic Church and the majority of denominations believe: (i) The gospel, (ii) In organizational structure, i.e., a leadership hierarchy, and, (iii) Worship. All agree that God is to be worshipped in the assemblies. The disagreements are in regards to the details: examples: (i) not all believe that Jesus was physically raised from the dead, (ii) not all agree that the leadership hierarchy must be according to scriptures, (iii), not all agree that worship must be according to scriptures. And there are myriad of other details on which there is disagreement, but they are willing to overlook all these things so they can *claim* unity.

c. The kind of ecumenical unity set forth by men is not what the scriptures teach. The scriptures clearly set forth the unity of the Spirit (brief explanations taken from C.G. “Colly” Caldwell’s commentary on Ephesians):

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in 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 you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

1) One body. The one body here is the church. Jesus promised to build one church (**Matthew 16:18**), which He began doing on the Day of Pentecost (**Acts 2:1-47**). “To say that there is ‘one body’ is to affirm unity of affiliation and membership with one another” (C.G. Caldwell). To affiliate one’s self with another body (denomination) goes against the teaching here. “By saying that there is ‘one body’ Paul is declaring a unity of membership among Christians in a single church which shines as a great light pointing the lost to Christ” (Ibid.).

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:15-18).

2) One Spirit. This suggests “unity of communication and manner of life” (Ibid.). It is the Holy Spirit that has revealed God’s word which teaches us how we ought to live. There is only *one* Holy Spirit and only *one* revelation of the Spirit. It is essential to listen only to the voice of the Spirit, i.e., the scriptures.

3) One hope. This involves “unity of aspiration, purpose, goals” (Ibid.). All Christians have the same great hope of the gospel – everlasting glory. It is our common hope that binds us together.

4) One Lord. This highlights unity of authority and leadership. Jesus is our Lord and He has all authority in heaven and on earth (**Matthew 28:18**), and He is the head of the church (**Colossians 1:18**). Jesus alone is Lord, and He alone has the authority to command.

Some say that we cannot be united in doctrine, but Christ gave gifts to the church to ensure this very thing!

5) One faith. Subjectively, faith is one’s personal conviction, compliant trust, and firm persuasion manifested in action. Objectively, as used here, faith is the body of teaching and doctrine revealed in the scriptures. “One faith suggests unity of doctrinal belief” (Ibid.). Jude wrote, “Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (**Jude 1:3**). Some claim that there can be no doctrinal unity among Christians because “we can’t all understand the Bible alike”. If this were true, then Jude’s exhortation to “contend earnestly for the faith” would be meaningless! In regards to understanding the Bible, Paul wrote, “For we are not writing any other things to you than what you read or understand. Now I trust you will understand, even to the end” (**2 Corinthians 1:13**).

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:11-16).

- 6) One baptism. This indicates unity of obedience (**Mark 16:16; cp. Acts 6:7**) and means of entrance into Christ (**Galatians 3:27**). It is at the point of one's obedience that God washes away one's sins (**Acts 2:38; 22:16**). Since baptism is for the remission of sins, one that has not been baptised (for this express purpose) has not had their sins forgiven, and such a one is not in Christ; having no right to be called a Christian.
 - 7) One God and Father. "One God implies unity of origin or source. It also implies unity of worship" (Ibid.). The God we worship is also our Father; the same Father to us all (**Malachi 2:10; Ephesians 2:18; 3:14**). "We are, therefore, brothers and sisters. We compose a great spiritual brotherhood of believers who share a common relationship to our divine parent. He is our progenitor" (Ibid.).
4. Can you imagine a congregation where unity was practically absent? You don't have to imagine it! Just read through 1 Corinthians; it's not pretty! (see article "Unity Within The Local Congregation"). Consider also: Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (**Mark 3:25**). Thus it is essential that each one endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (**Ephesians 4:3**). Are you doing this? If so, can you explain how?

III. Seeing Hope

If we have a genuine hope, then it will be seen in our speech and behavior.

1. The word "hope" as we tend to use it has a degree of uncertainty. Examples: (i) We might say, "I'm going to the park, so I hope it doesn't rain". Do you notice the uncertainty in that statement? (ii) An expectant mother might say, "I hope it's a girl!". Again, did you notice the uncertainty in that statement?

- a. Biblical hope is different because that for which we hope is certain. For example, we hope for eternal life. The following scripture show that there is *no uncertainty* in this hope because it is founded on the promise of God:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (**John 3:16**).

"And this is the promise that He has promised us - eternal life" (**1 John 2:25**).

"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God" (**1 John 5:13**).

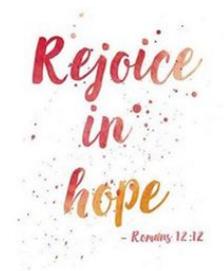
- b. Biblical hope has three main components:

"For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance" (**Romans 8:22-25**).

- 1) That for which a Christian hopes (eternal life) is something not yet seen or obtained.
- 2) Hope involves an earnest desire or longing.
- 3) Hope involves eager expectation.

2. Some things about hope you should know:

- a. It saves us (**Romans 8:24** ^{KJV}).
- b. It causes us to rejoice (**Romans 5:1-2; 12:12; Hebrews 3:6**).
- c. It causes us to be diligent to the end (**Hebrews 6:11-12**).
- d. It anchors our soul (**Hebrews 6:19**).
- e. It causes us to purify our lives (**1 John 3:2-3**).



3. Can visitors “see” our hope?

- a. Visiting unbelievers will “see” us talking, singing and preaching about hope. This may cause some to ask about our hope (1 Peter 3:15).
- b. Visiting Christians will also “see” us talking, singing and preaching about hope. They will also see the effects of hope in our lives, e.g., peace and joy (Romans 5:1-2).

IV. Seeing Good Works

Every Christian ought to be careful to maintain good works because (i) they are the proof of our faith, and (ii) they may lead others to glorify God.

1. Paul says that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works...” (Ephesians 2:10a). In another place he says that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Here’s an important point: we tend to think we are at liberty to define a good work for ourselves. However, notice what Paul says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). “Prepared beforehand. Every ‘work’ outlined in the New Testament for Christians, whether individual ‘work’ or congregational work, had been completely researched and thought out by God Himself” (Mark Dunagan). This means we ought to study the scriptures and find out what good works God has prepared for us.

Good works are the ones that God has authorized and regulated in His word. I must carefully look for these works in His word, and do only what He has commanded.
2. Can visitors to our worship service see our good works? (i) Individuals may report on good works they are doing, (ii) The church may make mention of the works it has planned, (iii) All that we do in our worship service (that is according to the scriptures) are good works, and (iv) the mutual love we demonstrate towards one another are good works. So yes, visitors will hear and see the good works we are doing.
3. When visitors see our good works it can lead them to glorify our Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16). It may even lead to non-Christians obeying the gospel (cp. 1 Corinthians 14:23-25; 1 Peter 3:1-2).

Conclusion

1. We ought to be concerned about the impression we leave with visitors; whether Christians or non-Christians. This doesn’t mean being crowd pleasers and appeasing their sensual appetites. It means arranging our services according to the will of God; doing all things by Christ’s authority.
2. When we have visitors there are things they ought to see in a congregation of professing Christians. They ought to be able to see love, unity, hope, and good works. This is not to say a visitor will see all these things in one visit, but all these things ought to be in place, nonetheless.
3. In visiting our congregation, there are two general responses: (i) “God is truly among you” or (ii) “You are out of your mind”. The former response is, of course preferable, but it takes the effort of each one of us, not just a few.

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Unity Within The Local Congregation

Ron Daly

Paul wrote to the Corinthians and said, “I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (**1 Corinthians 1:10**).

A careful reading of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians demonstrates that the congregation was full of problems. One of the problems was divisions — separation from one another by being followers of men and teaching and believing doctrinal heresy (**1 Corinthians 3, 15**). Paul did not write to them in order to say everyone has the right to believe and practice whatever he desires, but he wrote to rebuke them and to encourage them to correct their problems. He made a plea for unity! What things can be done to attain, maintain, and promote unity within the local congregation?

First, as Paul himself implied, people should be taught to respect the “name” or authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. If people do not accept the authority of the Lord, how on earth will they seek to be united on His will? They will not! “Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (**Colossians 3:17**). People who respect the authority of Christ will seek to achieve whatever the Lord has prescribed as a goal, and unity is such a goal. When people are in a state of anarchy, each person is a law to himself and there will be no unity, only chaos (**Judges 17:6; 21:25**).

Second, love must reign and be the bond that ties each person together. Paul said, “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body” (**Colossians 3:14-15**). If the members of a local congregation do not love one another, there will be no unity, only jealousy, strife, anger, resentment, gossip, slander, and everything else that pleases the devil. But, where genuine concern for the goodwill and spiritual well-being of people resides, there will be unity!

Third, there has to be the desire to have unity! Paul told the Ephesians to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (**Ephesians 4:3**). Unity doesn’t just happen, one must work for it. We must strive to keep unity. When a congregation recognizes just how pleasant unity is and how disheartening division is, each member will make every effort to seek and maintain unity! “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity” (**Psalms 133:1**). God, through Paul, says that saints are to “watch out for people who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (**Romans 16:17**). God’s people are to strive for unity and they are to oppose those who create division!

Fourth, there must be strict adherence to Christ regardless of the consequences. Paul sharply rebuked the Corinthians because they were followers of men and not of Christ. The work of men should be appreciated, admired, and encouraged, but Christ is the all in all. Men (preachers, elders, college professors, magazine editors, etc.) are often wrong, therefore, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord” (**Jeremiah 17:5**). God gives the increase within the local congregation (**1 Corinthians 3:5-9**). Strive for unity in the congregation.