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Unity In Variety -poonen - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2007/8/18 21:40

Unity In Variety

by Zac Poonen

There is a God-ordained variety in the Body of Christ.

God uses our different temperaments and gifts to present a balanced picture of Christ to the world. By ourselves, each of us can at best present only a distorted and unbalanced image of Christ. Any single person's ministry, by itself, can only produce unbalanced Christians. How thankful we have to be that there are others in the Body with different emphases and temperaments. For example, if two brethren are ministering the Word to the same group of believers, and one's emphasis is, "Don't be too sure that you are filled with the Holy Spirit, for you may be deceiving yourself", and the other brother's emphasis is, "Be sure you are filled with the Holy Spirit", on the surface they may appear to be contradicting each other. But both emphases are needed - so their ministries could be mutually complementary.

In the Body of Christ, we can have the followers of Calvinistic and Arminian theology working together, each bringing their distinctive emphases - for both viewpoints are in the Bible. As Charles Simeon once said in this connection, "The truth is not in one extreme nor in the other. Much less is it in the middle. The truth is in both extremes held simultaneously." So, we need people presenting both extremes.

Then again, there is room for 'outgoing' personalities as well as for shyer ones. Different temperaments can be mutually complementary. Some people may be over-cautious; never taking a step forward without much deliberation, weighing all the 'pros and cons', and wondering for a long time whether to move or not. Others are more carefree and tend to rush ahead enthusiastically, without thinking deeply about the consequences. Because both these (and other) kinds of personalities are found in the Body of Christ, there is a balance. If the Body consisted only of hesitant, deep-thinking personalities, progress might be too slow. Conversely, if the Body consisted only of impetuous enthusiasts, there might be too many unfinished projects.

Each temperament has its strengths and weaknesses. A variety of people with a variety of temperaments, working together as Christians, can present a more complete and more accurate picture of Christ to the world. So we should not be wasting our time trying to make everyone in the Body like ourselves. We should allow each one to be himself. What we do need to concentrate on, is how our strengths could support another's weaknesses. His strengths could in turn support our weaknesses.

By working together, Peter and John (men of different temperaments) brought more glory to God than they could ever have done independently. Paul and Timothy - strikingly different in their temperamental make-up - could yet labour together in the gospel and form a powerful team.

There are brilliant intellectuals as well as those with mediocre minds in the church. Naturally, their presentations of the truth of God will vary. But neither category can despise or criticize the other, for both are equally needed in the Body, to present the gospel to a world consisting of intellectuals and non-intellectuals, philosophers and housewives, students and farmers, etc., God needed a genius and a scholar like Paul for His work as well as an unlearned fisherman like Peter. They had different styles of preaching the same good news, but each had a distinctive part to play, and neither could have done the work that God did through the other, just as ably.

Conversion does not alter a man's intellectual capacities. Neither does it compel him to change his social status. The gospel does not eradicate the heterogeneous nature of society here on this earth, although social distinctions do become irrelevant in Christ. God had need for a wealthy man like Philemon as well as for Onesimus who was a servant in Philemon's house. Their social levels and standards of living remained unchanged, but each of them had a distinct contribution to make to the Body of Christ, that the other could never make; and so they could labour together in the gospel.

God never intended the Body of Christ to be full of people who were exactly alike in every way - like motor cars turned out of a factory. No. The very ministry of the Body is dependent upon the variety of its members. There would have been

stagnation and spiritual death if all were alike.

Even our disagreements with one another can be used of God to deepen our fellowship and lead us on to spiritual maturity. Proverbs 27:17 says, "Iron sharpens iron. So one man sharpens another." Two "iron men" can sharpen each other instead of clashing with each other.

Sometimes God places two people with different temperaments together in His work, and as they labour together, the sparks may fly between them, but this may be God's way of "sharpening" them. If one person is like iron and the other like clay, there will be no sparks and no sharpening either. Instead there will be the imprint of the iron on the clay - one strong-willed person's opinion forced on the weak-willed person. God's intention however is not that one person should force his views on another, but rather that both should learn from each other. We can disagree, but we can still be united, and still love one another. In fact, we can love one another more deeply in such cases.

I believe God permits differences of opinion (on non-fundamental matters) between different members of the church so that there is greater opportunity for the exercise of Christian love. Loving one another would have been an easy matter if we all saw eye-to-eye on every matter. But when we disagree, our love is tested. So we need to thank God for disagreements that do not divide or disunite us.

A Christian fellowship that boasts no differences of opinion is 'suspect'. The members of such a fellowship are either failing to think for themselves or being dominated by one strong-willed person.

True Christian fellowship is forged and sharpened on the anvil of healthy, loving disagreements.

Re: Unity In Variety -poonen - posted by Compton (), on: 2007/8/18 21:53

Great article. This shows that special character quality that Zac Poonen seems to have, where he is uncompromising in his convictions with scripture yet humble, patient, and gracious with people.

Thanks Greg,

MC