

Wittenberg 2017 Principles

1. The irresistible purpose of Jesus is to return to a united Church universal.
2. The current reality is that the Church universal is divided – in heart, purpose, thinking, and organizational structures.
 - a. Each division has a story.
 - b. Every division brings pain to God’s heart.
 - c. No division can be simply “undone.”
 - d. Any division can be healed and reconciled with the power of God.
3. Division weakens the Church universal.
 - a. Jesus said, “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.” (Luke 11:17) We certainly don’t believe that the kingdom of God is ruined or will fall, but do believe that Jesus’ principle is clear: division weakens.
 - b. St. Paul said, “Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... there should be no division in the body.” (1 Cor. 12:7,26)
 - c. Externally imposed sameness also weakens the Church. St. Paul also said, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit ... Now the body is not made up of one part but of many ... in fact God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?” (1 Cor. 12:4, 20, 24-25) Manmade uniformity is not the same as God-inspired organic unity. As opposed to division and uniformity, which both weaken the church, diversity strengthens and enriches the Church.
 - d. Jesus tells his diverse group of disciples, "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Then Jesus prays "that they may be one even as we are one ... that the world may know" (John 17:23). Thus Jesus ties the need for unity to the credibility of the Church’s witness. In our day, the divisions in His Church are a commonly cited reason to doubt Jesus and His message.
 - e. There is cause for great hope! The New Testament addresses division (between the Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus) and presents the Christ-centered model for transforming division into a reconciled diversity. “His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.” (Ephesians 2:15-16, see also Acts 15:1-35).
4. The Church universal should feel the pain of her divisions and grieve them.
 - a. Grieving is a public posture of lament before God.
 - b. Grieving requires memory.
 - c. Grieving requires emotion.
 - d. Jesus grieved the division of people of Jerusalem, longing to “gather their children together.” (Matt 23:37) Does he not also grieve the division among his followers and long to gather us together?

- e. Grieving does not solve the problem of division. It recognizes the gravity of that problem, and presents it to God the Father for His solution.
 - f. Grieving does not dishonor people or traditions.
5. The Church universal should pray for reconciliation and unity.
- a. Jesus did it. (John 17)
 - b. St. Paul did it. (Romans 15:5-6)
 - c. The Church historically has done it. For example, the following prayer is from the Catholic Liturgy of the Hours:
Lord, hear the prayers of your people and bring the hearts of believers together in your praise and in common sorrow for their sins. Heal all divisions among Christians that we may rejoice in the perfect unity of your Church and move together as one to eternal life in your kingdom.
 - d. In our day the Holy Spirit is inspiring a mighty wave of worship and prayer. Much of this prayer is directed towards asking God to heal the wounds of the Church and create a united body of Christ.
 - e. Prayer requires faith, not ingenious solutions. A seemingly unsolvable problem is not unprayable. Prayer about such subjects is the glory of the Church, because it requires faith and a reliance on the power of God. Prayer asking God to unify His Church is prayer about a problem that cannot be solved by a clever idea, a charismatic leader, or a carefully thought out program. It must be God, or it will not happen.
 - f. Jesus came to restore relationships – our relationship with the Father, and also our relationships with one another – “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13). When we pray with sincere hearts, God will show us our part in the process of restoration. Our response will require the good and hard work of repentance and reconciliation. This will take place person to person, leader to leader, group to group, faction to faction, church to church, culture to culture, and ultimately one historic stream of the Church to other historic streams of the Church. In this process, we repent for the sins of our own faith stream, not the streams of others. We honor other faith streams.
 - g. Christian unity is a natural outcome of Christ-likeness. As we mature in Christ-likeness, we mature in our capacity to celebrate and strengthen diversity; prevent diversity from becoming division; and take steps towards healing the divisions that are damaging the Church. “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:3)

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