

ONE CHURCH – MANY CONGREGATIONS

Excerpted and adapted from Derek Prince's teaching, "The Ethics of Ministry"

When we think about a big city we would say there are many different churches in that city. But I don't think that is how God sees it. I believe God sees only one church. After all, the book of Revelation tells us Jesus is going to marry the Church - His Bride - and I do not believe Jesus is a bigamist. He's only going to marry one church. So we can think about many different churches, but God sees only one church. When Paul wrote his epistles, he didn't write to the Baptist Church in Corinth, or to the Church of the Open Bible in Rome, or to the Evangelical Church in Ephesus.

He always wrote to the Church in the city. We are a long way from the reality of that today, but I don't believe God has ever changed His mind.

Therefore, I believe it is important that the leaders of congregations within a city or region know how to relate to one another. It's very easy to become self-centred - to think about "my church" or "our church" and to focus on that alone. But that is not a scriptural attitude. I believe we as leaders should see one another as co-elders in the same church.

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"Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." (Phil. 2:1-4)

Here, in his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul describes our attitude if we are to keep unity in the Body of Christ. He uses several different words, but there is one word that covers it all: humility. That's the key to unity. Proverbs 13:10 says, "Only by pride cometh contention." (KJV) So it's logical that the opposite of pride - humility - would be the solution to contention.

The Bible teaches that while God may be forced to humble us, or we transgress and end up humiliated, He prefers that we humble ourselves. It is not something God desires to do for us. It's something we should do for ourselves.

Paul also said to let nothing be done through selfish ambition. In my opinion, selfish ambition is the greatest single problem in the Church.

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I've seen over the years many Christian ministers who are very insecure because their security depends on personal success. I have a different view of life altogether. For me, success is to please my Father. And security is knowing I am loved by my Father. I believe that's what the Gospel is intended to produce. Christianity is primarily about right relationships, not only right doctrine.

If every church leader and pastor in a city had as their primary motive to please the Father, there would be no rivalry. There would be no competition. I believe that is the way God wants us to live. I believe it's the answer for the question of Christian unity and ethics. If we get right with our Father, all other relationships will fall into place.

"Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them." (Mt. 18:19-20).

In the Greek, "agree" is a musical word. It gives us the word "symphony". It speaks about harmony. And Jesus says, "If two of you can harmonize on earth about anything that they ask, it will be done for them." I'm not a musician, but I do know that to be almost in harmony is very painful. I've seen many Christian relationships and church leaders that are almost in harmony.

I think our broken relationships and lack of harmony cause God to stop up His ears in heaven.