

St. Paul's appeal and Jesus' prayer are powerful incentives for Christians, and especially members of a congregation to speak to and treat one another with love and respect. Called by God to be Christ's church, we put aside hateful words and speak to each other in love. (*Ephesians 4:14*)

So how do we get there? Well, we certainly don't just paper over differences. We don't just "make nice" and pretend everything is fine when maybe it isn't. We don't ignore the "elephant in the room" when there's something very wrong in the church. That might create an appearance of unity. But it's really just papering over the cracks.

The way we get to real unity is through Jesus' example, *prayer*, and through *meditating together on God's word*. As we do, we learn to *speak the truth in love* to one another. In his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asks of his Father to "*Sanctify them in the truth; your word is the truth.*" (*John 17:17*) That means we take our Bible and the words of Jesus seriously, and see ourselves as brothers and sisters who really care for one another.

Clearly, unity isn't the same thing as just making decisions through majority votes in meetings. If the only way we get the work of the church done is through majority votes, we'll always have winners and losers. There'll always be two groups, one happy, the other angry. That's not what St. Paul or Jesus had in mind. What God wants from us is to have the *same mind*, a mind informed by his Word and led by the Spirit.

We're Lutherans and not Quakers, but Quakers might have the right idea when it comes to unity. In their meetings, when a decision has to be made, they pray together and sit silently till they all agree. Then they act. If the church roof is leaking and about to fall in, and one side says patch it, and the other side says replace it, nothing happens till they all agree. It's amazing how fast you can come to complete agreement when a chunk of drywall falls on you and you trip over a bucket of water.

But the unity St. Paul appeals for is in matters of doctrine, right and wrong, and treating one another with love and respect. He's not asking us to toss out differences in culture and upbringing. The early church was made up slaves and freemen, Jews and Greeks, Romans and Africans. Those kinds of differences are like vibrant colors in a flower garden. They're to be appreciated and embraced. Cultural differences can enrich the church and make it stronger and more beautiful.