

STUDY GUIDE

WHAT ABOUT: DIVISIONS AND DENOMINATIONS (Week 1)

A MESSAGE SERIES AT NEW CITY CHURCH

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John 17:19-23

19 "For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. 20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

In this high priestly prayer, Jesus prays for the church. This prayer can teach us a lot about God desires for us. Jesus wants His church to unite around the essential beliefs that all Christians should hold. Still, in some areas, there is room for churches to do things differently. One way to think about it is this way: In the Essentials...we have unity; In the Non-essentials, liberty; In all things, we act in Love. Unity. Liberty. Love. But, make no mistake, unity doesn't mean uniformity.

There is a vast difference between unity (oneness of heart and spirit) and uniformity (everybody exactly alike). Christ never prayed that all Christians would belong to the same church. Unity comes from life within, not from pressure without. While Christians belong to different denominations, they are all part of the true church, the body of Christ; it is this spiritual unity in love that convinces the world of the truth of the Gospel. It is possible

for Christians to differ on minor matters and still love one another in Christ. - Weirbe's Critical Commentary on the New Testament.

Questions for Reflection

1. In your own words, what was Jesus praying for?
2. Why, do you think, most people argue over non-essential things?

The Essential.

*1 Corinthians 2: 1 And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. 2 For I determined to know nothing among you **except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.***

When Paul was dealing with new Christians, he started with the basics, with the essentials. For Paul there was one true essential, Jesus. In Jesus, we see the story of God from creation to the resurrection.

The (not so) essential.

Jesus + a great leader.

Paul knew the tendency of the early churches to "add things" to Jesus. It seems from the beginning of the church, we've always felt a tendency to think that Jesus wasn't enough. Often, we'll try to elevate a great teacher or leader to a higher position in our hearts than that person need to be. We can make man "king" and Paul knew it:

1 But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? 4 For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the

Lord assigned to each.6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.7 So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.8 He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor.9 For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building. 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

Jesus + worship style.

Not surprisingly, we see stories in the Scriptures of people making the place, type and style of worship essential when Jesus clearly states that they are not:

"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain, and you people say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship."... 24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to Him, "I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He." John 4:23-26

Jesus saw how this woman was trying to focus on the non-essentials (what land is most holy and therefore the best place to worship) and she didn't see THE essential One right in front of her! Today, we do the same thing if we are not careful. We worship the music and not the Creator of music. Enjoying the non-essentials is great, but non-essentials need to remain just that.

Questions for Reflection

3. Do you think it is okay to select a church based in part on style of music?
4. God no doubt gifts teachers to teach the Bible. But, how can we make a certain man or woman an idol?

By the numbers.

Today there are about 648 million Evangelical Christians in some 33,830 denominations! Yes, 33,830! Certainly not all of those

denominations are main stream, but the number allow illustrates the vast diversity in Christianity. Regardless of that number, however, the number that really matters is "one."

We are a body...

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism,6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. - Ephesians 4:1-7

One Lord. One Faith. One Body made up of...

Many Members.

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. 14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many.15 If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.16 And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 1 Corinthians 12:12-20

Questions for Reflection

5. What role are you called to play in the body of Christ?