

Madison Heights Christian Church
(Disciples of Christ)

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MADISON HEIGHTS MESSENGER

No. 9

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Christian Unity

The Christians at Corinth held a lot of different ideas, opinions, and interests. As they worked together in the church, there were different perspectives on how to address ministry. One such difference was a question of which spiritual gift was the most valuable. One group insisted it was the gift of speaking in tongues and they insisted that everyone else should seek that talent. Paul responded to the situation by saying that it is not the things that humans do that keeps the church together; it is God's spirit. People have to allow the Spirit to work within them; that is the glue that keeps the church together. A spiritual person is one who is willing to say "Jesus is Lord." According to the Apostle Paul, that confession is the best gift a church member can continuously give and yet no one can give that confession except by truly being motivated by the Holy Spirit. He went on to say that there are a variety of ways in which the Holy Spirit can work within people and there are varieties of ways in which we can serve as Christians. Paul states quite clearly that this variety is from God. The key question is how to tell when people have the Holy Spirit at work within them. Paul sets forth some guidelines for the answer. He says that a spirit-filled person will recognize that it is the Holy Spirit if it is for the unity of the church. To be a spiritual person is to have full participation in the body of Christ with each other. Spirit filled people will use their talents to build up other members, set a good example, and engage in teamwork and co-operation.

Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) said "In essentials unity, in non essentials liberty, in all things charity," It is a fulfillment of **John 17:20-21** when Christ prayed "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me." The unity we seek requires neither accepting any one point of view, or rigid doctrine. Campbell asserted that in order to be a member of the body of Christ, there needs to be mutual understanding and agreement on what the essentials are. Such unity ultimately is not achieved by standards, creeds, opinions, a constitution and bylaws, but rather is a gift from God. The essential things that we can all agree upon is that Jesus is our Savior and the Bible is our doctrine of faith.

Many ideas are threatened by differences of opinions but these ideas need to be welcomed in community discussion as other viewpoints help us to see the big picture. We honor and respect the gifts of others or we draw a small circle of a comfort zone around our own ideas which results in conflict and splintering of the Christian faith. Either we reach out to others with genuine hospitality or we covertly display incongruity. Either we extend love to everyone who enters the church doors or we guard our abilities to control, resulting in visitors not returning, people not taking on necessary leadership positions, and members leaving the church. It all depends upon whether we allow the Holy Spirit to work within us. And it makes all the difference in the world of whether we have a tower of Babel or whether we have the gift of God's presence in Pentecost. How small or large is the circle that makes up your faith, your spirituality, your Christian behavior, your life in the church? It all depends on you, your attitude, and whether or not you have the love of God at work in you or if there is another hidden force at work in you. Those who are united by faith in Christ are united to one another in the church as one body, the body of Christ.

George