

We think our choices can bring unity, yet often in is my way or no way. Someone can collect the best athletes available but that doesn't guarantee they will be the best team. Beautiful people can seek other beautiful people to marry, but if they spend too much time looking in a mirror and not enough looking at their spouse a marriage will not last.

Wherever there is NO unity, the root cause is "sin." Sin is the condition that places barriers between you and me, or between me and God. Sin precludes true UNITY from even being an honest word in our vocabulary. Unity only works if it is a goal. *Too often we say we want unity, but what we really mean is that everyone should think or see things the way I do – everyone else is the reason for a lack of unity.* The surrendering of self-interest is essential to achieve any goal! Unity must be the goal, and if it is, then it is a given that a common strategy is needed to get there ... and that will only happen with compromise, surrender, and sacrifice by all – not just by some!

Christ's prayer for his followers is ONEness. That sounds so nice. Why wouldn't that be everyone's goal? Why make such a big deal when it seems to be a no-brainer? But why is that so difficult. The United Nations has failed in that effort. Our own politicians give it lip service but don't mean it. Even families and congregations struggle with being one. Everywhere that unity should be a given, we see individual needs outweigh a common goal. ONEness is difficult because human differences are so many.

Sin is the breakdown of creation; the "blame game" that started in the Garden. The violent struggle of Cain and Abel. Sin is the self-love that makes ME more important than YOU and certainly doesn't keep God first. Sin lifts up "My needs, My perceptions, My desires, and destroys "unity" before anyone can even utter the word. Sin tempts us to think that unity is having everyone see the same thing I see in a mirror rather than looking through a window and realizing something stands between me and my brother.

Christ's gift of servant and sacrificial love is the healing that changes and heals our lack of oneness. The world talks a good game (listen to any politician) but most are interested in unity if it serves MY purpose and fills MY empty needs.

In reality, there can be no UNITY without ONEness and there can be no ONEness without the gift that Christ Jesus brings. That is why we see so many failed efforts at "unity" whether they are in marriage, politics, disputes between nations, friends, or even the life of a Christian congregation.

When Jesus prayed that all might be one, he was reminding his followers (then and now) what his goal is. He began by surrendering his heavenly ego to become a helpless baby. It continued by resisting the urge to fight Satan with angelic armies and risk being ignored, beaten, and killed. His commitment to

ONEness was completed by his willingness to be buried in our death, and then lift us up with him through Easter. He made himself ONE with us, before we were even born, so that we might have that gift of UNITY with God as the power of our interactions with each other.

His call for us to be ONE is where life must begin. This gift has already been given and must be treasured and cherished. IT is the beginning of our life as disciples, rather than a byproduct of our good intentions. Jesus prayed to remind us how difficult this journey will be and how tempted we will be to force unity on each other by the demands we make and the victories we desire. His way is more loving, and his gift must not be understated.

This is core of PEACE Jesus brings. It is different than the world's unity and has nothing to do with compromise or win-loss or my goals; but rather is all about a complete SURRENDER! Remember how Nicodemus was told he must be "born" in a new way? His question, "must I be born again," was an attempt for him to keep control, but in that question was the seed of the answer --"YES." Surrender to God's love is like becoming a baby again. It is a willingness to trust "the other" for protection, nourishment, and affection. It is about faith, and it is about surrender (not things we are naturally good at or inclined to.) Faith is love for the God who has surrendered himself so completely to me and following his example in serving those next to me.

As an example, think about marriage through the lens of ONEness, to understand Jesus' concept of unity. Marriage is the most delicate of relationships as two complete opposites commit to complement (rather than compete.) True marriage begins with a celebration of ONEness as a new life. Such an understanding leads to unity that the world could never achieve on its own.

When I surrender completely to my partner, out of sacrificial love, and my partner does the same for me – the result is a unity that is truly a gift of grace. It takes sacrifice, courage, and trust, but is a new creation that can never be destroyed. IF unity is not the starting point, the results will be abuse, disinterest, loss, and ultimately divorce. There is no "marriage" without UNITY first and ONEness as its power.

The cross and empty tomb brought all life and death to its knees at the throne of the Creator, and God made us ONE with Him. As we surrender self-interests to the ONEness that faith brings, God's love is the new creation that changes my world and yours. In other words, when I confess that God has given everything, he has to make ME ONE with Him will that certainly not change the way I live?

What God has joined together, let no one separate. It doesn't mean we won't have different visions, hopes, or dreams, but it means we will share them tother. That we may be one is our goal, God's gift, and his peace! -tws