

Chapter 45: The Purity and Unity of the Church

A. More Pure and Less Pure Churches

Paul's letters to the Philippians and Thessalonians reveal that they were relatively free from major doctrinal or moral problems (see Phil. 1:3-11; 4:10-16; 1 Thess. 1:2-10; 3:6-10, etc.), as opposed to the serious problems reflected in Paul's letters to the Galatians and Corinthians (see Gal. 1:6-9; 3:1-5; 1 Cor. 3:1-4; 4:18-21; 5:1-2; 6:1-8, etc.).

B. Definitions of Purity and Unity

Purity: The purity of the church is its degree of freedom from wrong doctrine and conduct, and its degree of conformity to God's revealed will for the church.

Unity: The unity of the church is its degree of freedom from divisions among true Christians.

C. Signs of a More Pure Church

1. Biblical doctrine (or right preaching of the Word)
2. Proper use of the sacraments (or ordinances)
3. Right use of church discipline
4. Genuine worship
5. Effective prayer
6. Effective witness
7. Effective fellowship
8. Biblical church government
9. Spiritual power in ministry
10. Personal holiness of life among members
11. Care for the poor
12. Love for Christ

→ **we are to work for the purity of the visible church**

D. New Testament Teaching on the Unity of the Church

--There is an actual spiritual unity in Christ [1 Cor. 1:2, Eph. 4:3-6]

--Because of this actual unity, believers are commanded to live in unity with one another, to avoid those who sow disunity, and to separate [1 Cor. 1:10, Rom. 16:17-18]

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E. Brief History of Organizational Separation in the Church

1054 A.D.—the Eastern (Orthodox) church separated from the Western (Roman Catholic) church

1521—Martin Luther, who wanted to reform the Roman Catholic church, was excommunicated

1525—the Anabaptists began to form churches of "believers only" in Switzerland

1570—the Anglican (Episcopalian) church was excommunicated ["We suffer schism, we did not cause it."]
[But in 1534 Parliament in England had passed laws placing the Church of England outside of the control of the Church of Rome]

In the centuries following the Reformation, Protestantism splintered into hundreds of smaller groups.

Three kinds of separation:

1. The formation of separate organizations
2. "No cooperation"
3. "No personal fellowship"

F. Reasons for Separation

1. Doctrinal Reasons
2. Matters of Conscience [2 Cor. 6:14]
3. Practical Considerations
4. Are There Times When Cooperation and Personal Fellowship are Prohibited?