

WHAT IS NEEDED FOR UNITY IN THE CHURCH

You can see quite a variety of ideas as to what is required for unity in the church. “We should only use organs during worship.” “We need to all lighten up and understand that the use of contemporary music will draw people in.” “We need to be missional minded.” “If everything looked the same from church to church we would have unity.” “We should try to look more like the New Testament church.” “We just need to focus on loving our neighbour.”

Many of these things can be broken into two categories: “fallible” and “in-fallible”. Things that fall into the “fallible” category are things that have been instituted by men, in many cases are in place for the sake of good order, and, may or may not have been inspired by Scripture. In and of themselves these things can be fruitful. Things that fall into the “infallible” category are things that have been given to us by God and are from Scripture.

What the church building looks like, the carpet, the pews, the altar, the font, the banners or paraments, these things are all fallible. The style of the music, the instruments used, how the church “does missions”, these things are fallible. That’s not to say that these things aren’t important, however, they do not serve as a primary source of true unity in the church.

So what is needed for unity in the church? Answer, that which is infallible, those things which God has given to us through Scripture. I believe our reformation fathers answered this question the best in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession:

For it is sufficient for the true unity of the Christian church that the Gospel be preached in conformity with a pure understanding of it and that the sacraments be administered in accordance with the Divine Word..

It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that ceremonies, instituted by men, should be observed uniformly in all places.

It is as Paul says in Eph. 4:4-5, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

It is interesting to note that what God gave us as the basis of our unity, Word and Sacraments, deals first and foremost with Justification, justification which is the work of Christ for us.

There is the proper preaching of the Word, in which the Law is declared in its full sternness showing our helplessness and deadness in sin, that the Gospel might be proclaimed in its full sweetness, that through the death of Christ our sins are forgiven, that through this preaching we might receive faith, (Romans 10:17). This, which is infallible, is necessary for unity in the church.

There is the proper administration of baptism, through water and the Word, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in which Christ saves us, (Ro-mans 6:3-4). This, which is infallible, is necessary for unity in the church.

And there is the proper administration of the Lord’s Supper, in which Christ works forgiveness of sins, (Matthew 26:26-28, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17). This, which is infallible, is necessary for unity in the church.

What is needed for unity in the church? Justification, given to us through the Word and Sacrament! Consequently, church unity is established as we gather around and properly understand these infallible gifts. Furthermore, as we gather around Word and Sacrament we will see a proper shaping of the rest of fallible aspects that make up the church.

What is needed for unity? Word and Sacrament are needed, and thankfully they are given to us by our gracious Lord.