



Ecumenicalism is it of God?

Paint the scene – on one particular street there are five church right next to each other; each one doing its own thing – showing the whole community that we as Christians cannot get along!! (This street actually exists with five churches on it!) The challenge to the church today is how is anyone going to take us seriously when we cannot even get along amongst ourselves. Surely this state of affairs undermines our integrity and ability to witness to the wider world?

Discuss – Why do you think the church is so divided, even after 2000 years of history?
 What do you think is the impact this has on the minds of the lost who look in on us?
 Do you think that it is important that we address this issue of unity, if so how?

The word ecumenical comes from the Greek word “*olkoumene*” meaning the whole inhabited earth. The goal of the ecumenical movement is “a planned bringing together of all Christians into visible unity!” Church history records 21 ecumenical councils set up to bring unity amongst God’s people from 325 AD to 1962

The modern Ecumenical Movement began at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910. Initially its goal was centered on promoting united mission of spreading the Gospel into the known world.

The World Council of Churches was formed in 1948 and alongside of the Roman Catholic church has actively promoted and supported the ecumenical movement. (The Roman Catholic church will not become a member of the World Council of Churches – because it sees itself as the One True Church in which all others need to unite – however it does send what are called “observers” to the World Council of Churches formal meetings!)

Discuss – Do you think that it is a good idea for churches to unite around the mission activity Jesus gave us, even if these means overlooking belief differences between us?
 What do you think could be the dangers of this?

Like in many discussions that take place in the church there are **TWO** main view points on promoting visible unity amongst churches:-

(1) Those who are for it – (discuss their arguments)

A) It is Jesus intention that we have unity and that we work towards it! - Those who are for the ecumenical movement start off by pointing to the prayer of Jesus found in John 17. A prayer to the Father that there would be unity amongst those who believe. **READ** John 17 v 20 – 23. What is argued here is that there is only one body of Christ / one bride and that division is not God’s perfect plan for the church. In fact Jesus calls His people to foster unity and find ways of strengthening the complete body of Christ, whatever the denomination.

B) If the church is truly to be anointed as God would intends, then God only brings His blessing down where there is unity! What is clearly declared here is that this Psalm using the symbolism of anointed oil to portray the giving of God’s blessing and authority to His people. **Read Psalm 133** Alongside of this Acts 1 – 2 is quoted to show that where there is unity there is also the activity of God through the Holy Spirit. **Read Acts 2 v 1– 4, Acts 2 v 42 – 44** Therefore everything must be done to promote unity and overlook anything that would divide us.

C) The rule of love compels us to love our brothers and sisters even though they may not be the same as us. Scripture is clear that one of the signs that we truly belong to God is that there is a love ignited in us for our brothers and sisters in Christ. In fact what is clearly declared is that if we do not have this love within us then we are not of God. This love that unites us comes from the love of the Father and is one of the visible signs to the lost that we truly belong to God. Anything that obscures this love undermines our ability to witness to Jesus. **Read 1 John 4 v 7 – 21**