

Heaven on Earth

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Frustration—life is filled with frustrations—pressures at work, struggles at school, feelings of being overwhelmed at home. Maybe you've made one of the following remarks: "A night without the kids would be 'heaven on earth.' I'd give anything if I could just have one night of peace and quiet." "If only I could find a fulfilling job that paid the bills—that would be 'heaven on earth?'" "It would be 'heaven on earth' to have a reprieve from all the relational conflicts in my life."

While the concerns expressed in these statements are certainly legitimate, they fall woefully short of what is truly "heaven on earth." I would like to suggest that God considers authentic biblical unity "heaven on earth." On the night Jesus was betrayed He prayed that His disciples might all be one so that the world may believe that God sent Him (John 17:11, 21). His prayer was quickly answered. After Jesus died on the cross, rose from the grave and ascended to heaven, the early church gathered for unified corporate prayer (Acts 1:14). Peter then preached a sermon and 3,000 people believed (Acts 2). A short while later 5,000 more believed through the preaching of the apostles (Acts 4). These powerful results stemmed from a unified church.

Tragically, one of the fundamental reasons that people reject Christ is because they observe so much disunity in the church. There is jealousy, strife, enmities, disputes, dissensions, factions, bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice (1 Cor 3:3; Gal 5:20; Eph 4:31). All of these sinful attitudes and actions grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 4:30). Consequently, we are not able to "attain to the unity of the faith . . ." (Eph 4:13)

The only way to reverse this trend and bridge gaps between denominational lines is by majoring on the majors, not majoring on the minors. For Bible-believing Christians, this means unifying around essential Christian beliefs such as the Bible is God's only authoritative Word (2 Tim 3:16); Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God and only way to heaven (John 14:6); and salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone (Eph 2:8–9). This side of heaven, we will not see eye-to-eye on many non-essential issues such as church government, baptism, women in ministry, and charismatic practices. These issues have nothing to do with our eternal destiny.

If you haven't already, will you make a commitment to model biblical unity in Thurston County (Eph 4:3)? Will you be careful not to say anything inappropriately critical about another pastor, leader or fellow Christian? If you do have something constructive to say, will you address that person individually? If you choose not to speak directly to the person, say nothing at all. Will you strive to speak only affirming words and challenge others to do the same? Will you take the initiative and develop friendships across denominational lines? Will you respect theological differences and seek to learn from other Christians?

A historic creed says it best: "In essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things, charity." As you love other brothers and sisters in Christ and dwell in unity, all men will know that you are Christ's disciples (John 13:35). Now this is truly "heaven on earth."