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Unity: New Concrete, Cracked Concrete

There are two major descriptors for concrete driveways, patios and other flat surfaces: new concrete and cracked concrete. Depending on soil conditions and the quality of ground preparation, the new eventually becomes cracked. Sometimes deterioration advances until removal is the only option.

Organizations experience a similar phenomenon. They begin with solid, unblemished unity. Then hairline cracks appear that, left unresolved, become fractures threatening the foundation. Unlike concrete, organizations are made of people, and the stresses they face can be a slow grinding or sudden and seismic.

Here is what puzzles me. Nearly everyone agrees that unity works. Eleven football players executing one play will fare better than eleven players running eleven plays. A family that hangs together through hardship comes out stronger. Unity is a superpower, yet being right can become more satisfying than striving for what is best for the whole. We say we want unity, but we enjoy a good fight. Too often we mistake winning an argument for helping the people beside us.

Maybe the trouble begins when we confuse unity with uniformity. A team does not need eleven quarterbacks. It needs different players, with different gifts and assignments, pulling toward the same goal. Unity is not agreement about everything. It is agreement about what matters most, with room for differences that do not threaten the mission.

That is where organizations often crack: not over the mission, but over the trim. Not over where we are going, but over how we prefer to travel. A preference gets promoted to a principle, and the person who disagrees becomes the problem.

Which brings me to the church. Christians distinguish between local congregations, with all their visible flaws, and the larger church Christ is gathering across nations and generations. Scripture calls her his bride and promises that he will present her “without spot or wrinkle” (Ephesians 5:27). That promise does not mean every congregation or denomination is unblemished now. Local churches are made of people, and people make cracks.

Hours before his arrest, Jesus prayed for those who would believe in him “that they may all be one,” giving this reason: “so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:20–21). He did not pray for unity merely to make life pleasant for insiders. He tied it to the people watching from outside.

The first believers shared their lives and resources, and their community grew (Acts 2:43–47). Later, Tertullian recorded what pagans muttered about Christians: “See how they love one another” ([Apology, chapter 39](#)). Even those who disliked them could see their love.

Yet the New Testament also reads like a maintenance log for cracked concrete. In Corinth, believers rallied around favored teachers: “I follow Paul,” “I follow Apollos,” “I follow Cephas” (1 Corinthians 1:12). Their preference had become a principle. If congregations planted in the apostles’ era cracked this quickly, ours should not shock us.

Jesus did not ask us to prefer the same music, order of service, carpet color or sermon length. Yet many disciples of Jesus have traded his prayer for a consumer contract: the church must satisfy my tastes, or I am leaving, and I will tell everyone why on my way out.

Stop the whining. There, I said it.

That rebuke includes me. It does not apply to abuse, dishonesty or failures to protect people; those require action, not silence. But our quarrels over taste consume energy meant for something greater. Christians believe sin separates all of us from God and one another and ends in death. Jesus came to restore what we could not repair. The skeptical neighbor, the exhausted parent and the lonely person need more from us than complaints about last Sunday’s service. They need to see a people who love one another while carrying that hope into the world.

Concrete may crack despite our best efforts. The unity Jesus prayed for calls for ours. It begins when we stop asking, “Do I like it?” and start asking, “What are we here to do, and who is it for?”