



## James Update

# Strengthening the Church in Latin America

March 2017

**Basis of Christian Unity:** What is the basis for Christian unity? Jesus prays for unity among believers in His High Priestly prayer in John 17. Jude urges believers to “contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”. Christians of all people should be concerned about unity! But what is the basis of our unity? Is it right doctrine? Is it love? Are there limits to unity? What guides our decision to be “one”?

Some initial thoughts: unity is something believers have always wrestled with! One distinctive of the Evangelical movement is our desire to join together with other believers in love on central issues of the faith. We avoid disagreeing about issues that are not essential to salvation. In I Corinthians Paul urges this when he instructs believers to avoid dividing over favorite preachers (some say, “I am of Paul”; other say “I am of Apollos”). He goes on in his same letter to warn against separation over spiritual gifts! “We are one body”, he says. “We have one Spirit who gives differing gifts for the purpose of building up the church -- don’t allow spiritual gifts to divide you”. Dividing over secondary issues is our constant temptation, but the Bible warns us against this! It encourages us to walk together in Christ’s love, basing our unity on Biblical truth central to salvation.

An opposite danger is basing our unity on “a loving spirit” or “having the Holy Spirit” or “experience”. Loving, Holy Spirit guided experience is important, but it can never serve as the basis of unity. A “loving spirit” sometimes encourages heresy to accompany it. And “experience” is completely subjective. So these cannot be the basis of Christian unity. For the Bible clearly warns believers to separate from anything that undermines the central ground of our salvation (Galatians chapter 1), counseling us to honor Christ by thinking and living true to God’s Word.

So what is the basis for Christian unity? It is our common commitment to God’s Truth central to salvation -- without additions or subtractions. What unifies us is our base-line commitment in Christ to walk under the banner of the gospel. We will agree at times to disagree on non-essential issues, but we will endeavor to walk together in grace-enabled patience and love in the bond of the Spirit.

These are challenges we face daily as Equipping Servants expands around Latin America. Because we purposefully work together with a broad scope of Evangelical denominations (eg, Pentecostal, Baptist, Anglican, Brethren, Alliance, Assemblies ...) we encounter constant differences on non-essential issues. But we always look to God’s Word to guide us in walking together under the banner of the gospel – to stop walking alone. Please pray that the Lord will allow us to encourage and build up the church around Latin America as pastors and church leaders agree to walk together, studying the Bible and relying on God’s Spirit to honor Christ. We long to see a strong church being built up, with believers taking responsibility to make Christ known to unbelieving people, so that no one lives or dies without hearing the good news of the gospel of Christ!

**Thankful for your partnership in the gospel, Kep and Debbie**

### Our Purpose ...

to honor Christ strengthening the church in Latin America to be true to the Bible, discipling believers in Christ & taking the gospel where it is least known.

#### Please Pray:

- **Equipping Servants (ESI) pastoral training** —that the 850 active participants & 1625 grads since 2002 will know the sufficiency of Christ & His Word to impact the world & church for Christ.
- **14 Pastoral-Assistant Volunteers:** intensive 2 year training for pastors in Bolivia.
- **ESI Expansion: Pray** as we start new training centers in Uruguay, Colombia, Cajamarca, Peru & Temuco, Chile. **Pray** for 2000 Pastor-Book-Sets needed for ESI Expansion.
- **Family:** Andrew & Angie are in Uruguay. Pray for the next 2 years as they learn the culture and build relationship to plant churches in the very spiritually challenging city of Montevideo. Katie is seeing gospel impact in her relationships in Cleveland. Sami is looking for a job as a chef, & Heather serves in the ILC church in La Paz in a ministry Biblical Counseling.