

Experts point to a number of reasons why mergers fail: the lack of pre-planning, insufficient researching into one another, poor communication and governance, and a lack of a shared vision are just a few of the problems that can lead to a corporate divorce or Chapter 11.

But perhaps the biggest reason is the inability to merge two different cultures into one new and cohesive culture. When employees get used to doing things one way, it's hard to do things another way. When one corporate culture or goals overshadow the other, it's little wonder that one of the partners feel slighted. It's difficult to move forward when one side of a partnership is undervalued, be it in a marriage, a company or a church.

Jesus was a master at this kind of work, especially when it came to acquiring partners for his kingdom business venture and merging them together into one church. He gathered together 12 men, with all their disparate desires, expectations and cultures, and formed them into a corporate group of disciples with a common mission and a new culture. As he prepared to depart from them, he prayed that they, and all those in the future who would believe in him "through their word," *would be as one* (vv. 20-21).

The model for their (and our) new corporate culture is found within the very nature of God revealed in the Trinity. Jesus prayed: *As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe you have sent me* (v. 21). In chapter 14, Jesus has already revealed the person of the Holy Spirit that will come upon the disciples. Jesus prayed that the disciples - past, present and future - would reflect the unity of the Father-Son-Spirit in their corporate faith and work, so that the mission of reaching the world with the good news would pass from Jesus to them undiminished.

Unfortunately, that culture change has been slow in coming for Jesus' followers in the years since. Despite denominational mergers and calls for unity, the church often acts as though its disparate cultures are sacred cows that require constant care and feeding with separate visions of what Jesus would have those in the church do and be.

Case in point: The two largest Presbyterian and Lutheran Denominations are now in full communion, but the negotiations to achieve that unity once seemed interminable. For quite some time, Presbyterians and Lutherans could share most anything liturgically, including the ashes of Ash Wednesday, but not the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. In a sermon, Presbyterian theologian Jack Stotts shared the ironic remark of a Lutheran colleague, who observed: "How strange it is that we can share the ashes of death, but not the bread of life."

The divisions of liberal and conservative, high church and low church, eastern and western, Protestant and Catholic, individual gospel and social gospel, traditional and contemporary music have done precisely the opposite of what Jesus intended and prayed for us. Rather than causing the world to believe that God sent Jesus for its salvation, we have instead caused the world to see the divisions of the church as evidence that if there's good news out there somewhere, it won't be found in the church. We've had far more spin-offs and breakups than mergers and acquisitions; and the unifying message and person of Jesus gets lost as churches and denominations are more apt to argue and leave one another, than work to restore a common vision and life together.

Now, certainly, there are times when a merger isn't advisable. If the parties have different aims, and refuse to adapt, it's going to be a non-starter. When churches and individuals drift from a core belief in Jesus as being one with God and fail to act on that belief, unity will be elusive.

In many cases, however, it's the minor differences that often keep us from being truly one. We are quick to defend our positions on points of doctrine and practice, for example, but the relationship between God and Jesus reveals that it's *posture* that matters more than position. For Jesus, it's the *posture* of God toward him and from him toward God that provides the model for Jesus' followers. It's the posture of glorification and love.

The glory that you have given me I have given them, prays Jesus, *so that they may be one as we are one* (v. 22). "Glory" is a major theme in John's gospel, and here Jesus uses it to describe both what he has received from God and what he has given to his disciples. It is a reflected glory, an angled mirror that reflects God's love to the world through Jesus to us and through us to the world, which, in turn, reflects glory back to God. It's not about glorifying ourselves, our churches, our doctrines or our positions; it is about being called to be a community that always reflects God's glory as it is revealed in Jesus and expressed through the Spirit. When the different churches that make up the body of Christ begin to focus on that glory, the path to unity and true union becomes clearer.

That glory is best revealed through our love for God and one another. *I made your name known to them, and I will make it known*, prayed Jesus, *so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them* (v. 26). This is similar to what Jesus says in 15:12: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you*. Notice the chain of love: God gives love to Jesus, Jesus gives it to us and we give it to one another. Love is a gift given

to us to be passed on to someone else. We reveal the love-glory of God when we love one another in the way that Jesus loved us: love, in spite of our sin; love, regardless of our position; love, with little heed paid to minor differences in doctrine and practice. Jesus invites us to form a new culture in the church, a culture centered on reflecting the glory of God through our love for God and one another. The body of Christ will become more spiritually profitable and practically successful in reaching the world if it is willing to adapt to that culture change.

Corporations have a tough time pulling off mergers because everyone tends to be in it for themselves. Christians can more successfully merge because we're in it for God's glory, mission and love and nothing else! That's a marriage made in heaven!

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You are our Prince of Peace! You prayed for unity in the body of Christ – that we may be united in love just as you are united with God - in love. Give us the desire to love one another, as you have loved us - for by this will all people know that we are your disciples. Give us a hunger to live in union with each another, and may we be united as one, in the bond of peace and fellowship, in the Spirit. This we ask in Jesus' name. Amen

Sources:

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Jesus on Mergers and Acquisitions

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John 17:20-26

If you're into following the trials and tribulations of corporate America, you know that corporations sometimes act like love-struck teenagers looking to date and acquire the objects of their affections. Usually, it's one powerful company going after a small, but vibrant one. It's called "mergers and acquisitions," the corporate marriages that can make or break the future of two companies.

Sometimes the marriage can be a fairy tale story like that of Disney and Pixar, where two creative entertainment companies came together in a partnership that's largely resulted in a lucrative partnership. Or the marriage might look like Exxon and Mobil, which is a remarriage of two, old 19th-century Rockefeller companies, and which created the largest corporation in the world.

Then again, there are times that these corporate marriages are a complete disaster, like the merger of The New York Central and Pennsylvania railroads in 1968. Both companies faced declining rail travel, so they merged hoping to reverse the trend. The gamble failed and they filed for bankruptcy two years later effectively killing large-scale passenger rail service in the United States. Another example is the Time Warner and AOL merger, which quickly became a dial-up marriage in a DSL world.

The examples of similarly failed partnerships are myriad. In fact, the list of failed mergers seems to be longer than that of successful ones. According to a KPMG study, the failure rate is as high as 83%, which leads us to ask why it's so hard for people to get together: whether it's a marriage of two people, the merger of two corporate cultures, or even the coming together of two or more Christian denominations to form a new church.