

UNITY

Maybe you have heard the story of the man that was out on walk one night when he saw another man about to throw himself from a bridge into the river. He ran over to save him.

"Why do you want to kill yourself?" the man asked.

"I have nothing to live for" the other said. "Do you believe in God?" "Yes I do."

"What a coincidence - so do I! Are you Muslim, Jewish or Christian?" "Christian."

"What a coincidence - so am I! Protestant or Catholic?" "Protestant."

"What a coincidence - so am I! Anglican, Methodist or Baptist?" "Baptist."

"What a coincidence - so am I! Southern Baptist or Independent Baptist?" "Southern Baptist."

"What a coincidence-so am I! Premillennial return of Jesus or amillennial?" "Premillennial."

"What a coincidence-so am I! Pre-tribulation rapture or mid-tribulation rapture?"

"Mid-tribulation rapture." At that the first man pushed the suicidal man into the river shouting "Die heretic, die!"

While this is story is amusing the issue is not. Far too often we as Christians allow our differences to divide us. God has called us to be united. After spending 3 chapters reminding the Ephesians of who they are in Christ he then reminds them of their responsibility to live lives that reflect who they are. The first issue he addresses is unity.

Eph 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

One of the saddest things that can happen in a church is when people begin to fight each other instead of working together. It happens all the time. History is full of sad stories about Christians fighting among themselves.

In the 1890s there was a small Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky. The church had just two deacons, and those two men seemed to be constantly arguing and bickering with each other. On a particular Sunday, one deacon put up a small wooden peg in the back wall so the pastor could hang up his hat. When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged. "How dare someone put a peg in the wall without first consulting me!" The people in the church took sides and the congregation eventually split. To this day the residents of Mayfield County still refer to these two churches as Peg Baptist and Anti-Peg Baptist.

1. The Facts About Unity - (vs. 4-6)

The fact is that, as Christians, we are all part of one family. We are all sisters and brothers in the Lord and we will be so forever. That is a fact. Take a long look at the person beside you and get to know them because you are going to be living together with them for eternity. Because we will be living with one another forever THERE we need to start learning how to behave and live with one another HERE.

A man once asked the pastor, "How many active members do you have in your church?" The pastor said, "They're all active. Half of them are working with me and half of them are working against me."

Just because we are all part of the same family doesn't mean that we will always get along. Unity requires effort. Paul writes in verse 3 to "make every effort" to keeping the unity. That shows us that being united can be hard work! e.g. your relationship with your family. As one poem puts it:

To dwell above with saints we love, that will be grace and glory. To live below with saints we know; that's another story!

Before Jesus went to the cross he took time to pray for those of us who would put their faith in Him. In His prayer he recognized that unity was very important and that His wish was that we as His family would get along and work together.

John 17:20 My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

The fact is that we are all family and will dwell with Christ together forever. We need to work at being what we in Christ have already become. During the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or we shall all hang separately."

2. The Factors Effecting Unity - (vs. 2)

There are several practical ways Paul tells us that we can work towards unity. The first factor is Humility. The Greek word for humility is TAPEINOPHROSUNE (tapi-nof-ros-oo-nay) which is a combination of the words TAPEINOS (low or close to the ground) and PHREN (understanding). To be humble literally means to have "low to the ground understanding" or to have "lowliness of mind". In other words, we don't think too highly of ourselves. It does not mean that we have a poor self image and walk around thinking less of ourselves than we should.

Humility means that we see ourselves through God's eyes and see our lives as a gift from God. We recognize that any ability we have has been given to us by God. Often we approach church like we do the kid's game "king of the castle". Everybody wants to be make it to the top and stay there. Jesus however told us that the person who leads is the person who serves.

Walter Cronkite tells a story about when he was sailing his boat down a River in Connecticut. Going through shallows a boat filled with young people sped past him. The young people were shouting and waving their arms and yelling "Hello Walter, Hello Walter ". Cronkite waved back thinking how nice it was to be successful enough that people recognized him wherever he went. His wife asked him, "Do you know what they were shouting?" He replied, "Yes, they were shouting Hello Walter". She said, "No, they were shouting "Low water. Low water." Such are the problems when we have too high a view of ourselves.

The second factor that contributes towards unity is gentleness or meekness. It is the Greek word is PRAOTES (pra-ot-ace) which means not relying on your own strength. Meekness is not weakness (the lack of strength) but strength under control. e.g. Seeing a Gorilla with a kitten.

This word was used of wild horses that were broken and trained. Meekness is the quality of a strong personality who is nevertheless master of himself.

The third factor is patience. This is from the word MAKROTHUMIA (mac-roth-oo-mee-ah) which comes from the words MAKROS (long in length) and THUMOS (anger or rage). This is how we come up with the word long-suffering. Often people are difficult to deal with. They will irritate us and disappoint us. They will do things that hurt us. To be patient means that we endure suffering from the hands of another. That is why he says "bearing with one another". This is the same thing he says in Colossians:

Col 3:13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another

Two men were riding a tandem bicycle when they came to a very steep hill. It took a great deal of struggle for the men to finally get to the top. When they got there the man in the front turned to the guy in the back and said, "Man, that sure was a hard climb!" The fellow in the back replied, "Yes, and if I hadn't kept the brakes on all the way up I'm sure we would've rolled back down the hill."

A little boy was sitting on his front steps, his face cradled in his hands, looking upset. His dad had just come home from work and he asked the boy what was wrong. The boy looked up and said, "Well dad, just between the two of us, I'm having trouble getting along with your wife."

Patience is when your will is dictated by the will of another. The only way you can learn patience is by enduring trial. If you really want to grow in patience then get married. e.g. favorite Bible book goes from Song of Solomon to Lamentations.

Lastly Paul says the unity is based in love. Love gives. The word here is AGAPE which means divine or Christ like love. He could have used the word PHILIA which means brotherly love or EROS which means romantic love. AGAPE love is self-sacrificing unconditional love. It is not an emotion but a command.

3. The Focus of Unity – (vs. 1)

Often people do not get along because they fail to understand what unity is really all about. Unity does not mean uniformity. That means we do not all have to be the same. As Christians we are not called to all look the same and act the same. We are different. We all have the same God and Spirit but we have different gifts and are different people. God is a God of diversity, and unity is reached when each member uses their individual gifts together.

Unity also does not mean unanimity. It does not mean that we will always agree on everything and that all decisions will always be unanimous. We are not called as Christians to necessarily agree on everything either. We have the same foundational truths and beliefs but may disagree on different things beyond that. Unity means visible co-operation and working together despite our differences. e.g. Sweet and Sour.

We need to major on the majors and minor on the minors. People who are busy rowing the boat usually do not have time to rock it. When fishermen don't fish they fight. When our focus is not outward and we do not do the work that Jesus has called us to do then our attention and energy turns inward and often becomes destructive. What unites us is vision.

It is great again to see these people being baptized and 19 people coming into membership. God is at work in this place.

Last fall we had our 50th anniversary as a church. Our campaign is called Looking Back, Moving Forward. Our goal was to reach \$100,000 last year and \$150,000 this year. The money we are going was going towards 3 goals.

The first is CELEBRATE. We are wanting to do an update of our sanctuary and foyer. You will notice that there have been many changes in the foyer over the last year. We want to replace the wooden doors in the foyer with glass ones to increase the light and also replace the flooring in the foyer to make it more inviting for people when they first enter the church.

We have some big events coming up this year. On Saturday May 10 we will be having Steven Curtis Chapman. Tickets for this vent are available from a link on our website and they are selling out fast. The next day is Sunday and we hope to have Dan Bremmes who opens for SCC lead the worship in church. In the fall we hope to have Gary Chapman at the church talking about the 5 love languages.

The second emphasis was on CONNECT. We want to raise money to update our classes and meeting halls. Again, you will notice that in the last year we have been updating our classrooms with new ceilings, paint and flooring. We are fixing up new youth rooms for our Senior High and Junior High kids. This year we would like to completely redo the Youth Auditorium and turn into a chapel. We want to do this to make the room more usable. One of the things we would love to dream about doing this year is to plant a new ethnic congregation in the coming year.

The third emphasis for our anniversary campaign is COMMUNICATE. The money raised in 2013 is being used towards a short term mission trip to Japan and also to purchase scriptures for local evangelism. Much more is being planned for the coming year.

A few years ago at the Special Olympics in Seattle, WA, nine physically or mentally challenged runners lined up at the starting line for the 100 meter run. At the sound of the gun, all the runners eagerly started out. As they ran one boy stumbled and fell. He tumbled over a couple of times and began to cry. The other eight runners heard the boy cry and they all slowed, turned around and paused. Then they all turned back. Every one of them. One girl with Down syndrome bent down and kissed the boy on the knee and said, "That will make it better." Then all nine of them linked arms and walked together to the finish line.