

February 7, 2010 AM

OUR UNITY IN CHRIST

“Anchors That Hold”

Ephesians 4:1-14

In Chapter 1-3 we see, ***“The calling we have received and the focus is on our wealth in Christ.”*** Beginning in Chapter Four the challenge is to live a worthy life and the focus is on our walk in Christ. While we don't understand our calling and our wealth in Christ, we will never have the courage and confidence to walk the worthy walk in Christ. We will become discouraged and our life will be marked by failure.

Today our message is about walking in unity. The Christian life is a walk. We don't rush to our destination. Jesus said to the disciples, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”*** ³⁵ ***By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** (John 13:34-35)

What makes a great church? The answer is not its history, location, size or building, but PEOPLE! And if Satan defeats the church he does not simply destroy its buildings or program; he attempts to bring disunity. We need to be aware of this. Paul calls for the believer to sacrifice for the unity of the body. What divides most churches is not doctrine but the opinions, attitudes and convictions of the people who worship together. It's not easy to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

I. Develop three attitudes.

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love...” (Eph. 4:1-2)

Three ways we love each other:

A. Humility.

1. Humility is not seeing ourselves as less important; it's seeing others as more important.
2. It's not putting myself down; it is lifting the Lord up.
3. Humility has to do with perspective; how we see ourselves and each other. "Whose we are and who we are."
4. Pride is depending upon myself; humility is depending upon God.

"Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." (Phil. 2:4)

B. Gentleness.

1. This is not weakness, but meekness (power under control).
2. Meekness is the character of the greatest men in both testaments:

Moses ... ***"Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." (Numbers 12:3)***

Jesus ... ***"Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matthew 11:29)***

***NOTE** Anything out of control is dangerous in nature or the animal world.

C. Patience.

1. Patience literally means "long-tempered."
2. It's not the idea that you are never angry, but angry about the right things.
3. In this passage Paul is saying unity is worth sacrificing by being patient.

***NOTE** Jesus laid aside His divine prerogative and took on flesh. He had to be patient to let His body learn to speak, to eat, to walk. The creator of the world who spoke the world into existence had to nurse from his mother's breast. He humbled Himself to obey to the point of going to the cross. He did not have to. He could have called the Holy angels, blinded the eyes, stopped their mouth or changed their language so they could not communicate. But He waited for the right time and way, to fulfill His eternal plan. We are to "bear with one another in love." Why? Because when you live with a family we have to put up with each other's weaknesses too.

II. Determine to work at it.

"...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3)

A. The challenge of unity is diversity.

1. We are so different in our thinking and our gifting.

***KEY** We must discover the need for unity in purpose and diversity in personality.

2. Unity is not uniformity. We are not all the same and that's good.
3. We have different personality temperaments and spiritual motivational gifts.
4. God has planned us to be different.

"There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. ⁶ And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. ⁷ But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all..." (1 Cor. 12:4-7)

III. Dedicate yourself to God's truth.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:4-6)

A. There are seven spiritual realities that unite all believers in Christ.

1. One body: The church universal.
2. One spirit: The Holy Spirit.
3. One hope: We are all looking forward to going to the same Heaven.
4. One Lord: Jesus Christ.
5. One faith: ***“...but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh.”***
(Jude 23)
6. One baptism: Baptized by the Holy Spirit.
7. One God.

B. This is the foundation, not the house.

1. Houses can be built on the same foundation and from the same blueprint, yet look totally different.
2. We may look a little different, but we have the same foundation and if we build on that, we will have unity.

***QUESTION:** Why are there so many denominations?

ANSWER: Because we disagree about the non-essentials. One can be wrong about eschatology and still be in heaven. You can be wrong about speaking in unknown tongues and still be in heaven. But you cannot be wrong about these seven things and be in unity. When you are tempted to disunity, remember:

- One body: Whatever hurts them hurts me.
- One spirit: The Holy Spirit within us agrees.
- One hope: We are going to spend eternity together.
- One Lord; Jesus thought of us both as He died on the cross.
- One faith: We agree in the essential; the most important things.
- One baptism: We are marked by God as believers.

- One God: We are both creative expressions of a loving God.

“God is overall ... through all ... in all.”

Paul and Barnabas disagreed and went separate ways; both still in partnership with Christ and the gospel. Being unified does not mean we have to agree upon everything. It's OK to love each other and to go in different directions. God has different paths for us to travel. We should focus on what we agree upon, not on what separates.

IV. Delight in the truth God has gifted you.

***“But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift.
⁸ Therefore He says: ‘When He ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men.’⁹ (Now this, ‘He ascended’—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?¹⁰ He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers...” (Ephesians 4:7-11)***

“Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant...” (1 Cor. 12:1)

A. Paul’s illustration.

***NOTE** The showcase of Ephesus was the Temple of Diana. It was said that when this goddess came to earth, this was the very spot she came to from the heavens.

1. Paul said Jesus not only descended but He ascended.
2. The point is Jesus has used an awesome display of His mighty power to give each one of His children His gifts.
3. He pronounced His victory over death and the grave.
4. Jesus did what had to be done and so must we.

***NOTE** We need to get off the “won’t it be great when we get to heaven” and let’s get to work now.

B. The purpose of diversity is ministry.

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-12)

1. Gifts enable us to serve, but people equip us for service.
2. We are to depend on God-given leaders who can help develop your God-given gifts.

Apostles: Started the church. They were the disciples, minus Judas, plus Paul.

- Chosen by Christ personally.
- Personally seen the resurrected Lord.
- Did miracles through divine power.

Prophets: Old Testament prophets spoke forth God’s Word. Peter said, “We have a more sure word of prophecy – “the scripture” (1 Peter).

Evangelists: We are all called to be witnessed but there are those called to be evangelists.

Pastor/Teacher: Three words are used to describe what a pastor/teacher is: Bishop, Elder, Shepherd.

V. Decide to use your gift to serve others.

“...for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:12-13)

A. Spiritual gifts are not toys to play with or weapons to fight with, but tools to build with.

1. There is not an endless list and you have one or two.

2. They are spiritual temperaments that motivate you for doing ministry with a heart for seeing lives built up together.

“Each of you has received a gift to use to serve others. Be good servants of God's various gifts of grace.” (1 Peter 4:10, New Century Version)

B. Spiritual gifts are not God's rewards to believers, but motivations triggered by God to serve.

- Romans 12 lists them.
- 1 Corinthians 12-14 lists how they are manifested.
- Ephesians 4 gives the way they are used.

C. The goal of ministry is maturity. *“...to build up the body of Christ...”*

1. I cannot mature unless I minister.
2. Most believers are immature because they don't involved themselves in ministry.

Unity's characteristics:

- Unity of the faith: We would know the same thing.
- Knowledge of Jesus: We all know Him personally.
- Be complete in Christ: So people see Jesus in us.

D. The reason of maturity is protection.

“...that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting...” (Ephesians 4:14)