

## **UNITY WITH PEACE**

**By Terry Jones, May 4, 2008  
Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio**

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

#### **CENTRAL SERMON THEME – God's Spirit makes us one in Christ and we believers have the responsibility to preserve the unity.**

**INTRO.** - The early followers of Jesus Christ enjoyed unity after the church was established in 30 AD. The Apostles promoted unity as they modeled the unity Jesus had taught them. Persecution promoted unity in the early church. Persecution kept the first Christians focused on God and the enemy. John Calvin called division "the Devil's chief device." Since the church divided, disunity has been the curse of Christianity.

Jesus prayed in John 17 that believers would be one in order for the world to believe that God sent Jesus. Unity among Christians is a powerful witness for God. Disunity is a powerful witness against Christ. Jesus said His church would be built upon a rock (Jesus is the Son of God) and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it. Jesus promised His enemies could not destroy the church. While external forces could not stop the movement of God's church, internal division within the church has hindered more progress more than all God's enemies could possibly accomplish.

The preacher Kent Hughes wrote about a faction in a church that led to a court case and division. The civil court refused to hear the case referring it back to the denominational headquarters. The denomination chose to give the building and property to one of the factions which resulted in the other opposing party establishing another church. The division started when one of the leaders of the church sat beside a young boy at a church dinner. The leader noticed the boy had received a better piece of ham than he received. This man became so upset he started a conflict that led to the division.

I know personally of a church named the Philadelphia Church. Philadelphia means "brotherly love." A conflict erupted over a man turning off the air conditioning one hot summer day during the worship service. Another man turned the AC back on. These two men played with the thermostat until they both got angry. The church divided into two groups; one wanting AC and the other not wanting AC. Finally one member decided to go to court to sue the other family for possession of the building. Eventually most of the members left the church. This church of "brotherly love" shamed the name of Christ.

God loses when His people divide and fight each other. On Route 60 in northeastern Kentucky two church buildings are located almost directly across from each other. Years ago a dispute arose among the leaders of a church over where the coal would be stored for the winter. One leader wanted the coal to be placed on the one side of the building but the other leader wanted it on the other side of the building. The conflict grew heated leading to one of the men getting his way. The other not only left but he started a church across the road. Those two churches are still known as the churches who split over a coal pile. Someone told this story commenting, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father, and two coal piles."

No church can afford to divide. The best time to be instructed about unity is when the church is enjoying unity. The best cure for cancer is early detection. The earlier the discovery of a malignancy raises the probability of being a cancer survivor. All of us hope for the day when every cancer patient becomes a cancer survivor. Every church has the seeds of division. If someone could unite all our weaknesses we could be most destructive. Seeds of discontent can be planted in the soil of the weaknesses of our hearts. We invite God's Spirit to work in our hearts when the weaknesses are still small. God's Spirit wants to unite our giftedness and strengths to the praise and glory of God. Our instructions are:

## **I. LIVE IN A MANNER WORTHY OF OUR CALLING**

### **A. God calls us to have faith in Jesus Christ.**

1. Eph. 2:8 - For by grace are you saved through faith.
2. God calls us with His mercy and grace.
3. We answer the call with faith in God.
4. The earliest name for Jesus' followers was the "called ones," the church.

### **B. Paul introduces himself as a prisoner for the Lord.**

1. Paul is now a prisoner for Christ in the city of Rome.
2. His high level of commitment to Jesus Christ caused his imprisonment.
3. Paul collected money from the Gentile churches to aid the Jewish believers back in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.
  - a. A drought had made life very difficult for these followers of Christ.
  - b. Paul believed the Gentile Christians needed to help the Jewish Christians because they were their brothers in Christ.

- c. As Paul journeyed toward Jerusalem to deliver these gifts to the needy, numerous people urged him not to go.
  - d. He went to Jerusalem where he was falsely accused of taking a Gentile into the temple and he was arrested.
4. Reminding the Ephesians he was a prisoner sends a message to these Ephesian Christians to catch his zeal for Christ and the unity of Christ's followers.
- C. Applic. - Are we ready to join Paul in living up to our calling?
1. Walk in humility and gentleness.
    - a. The world of Christ's time viewed humility as a weakness.
    - b. The powerful people oppressed the humble and gentle people.
    - c. Christ gave new meaning to humility and gentleness.
    - d. Ex. - Jesus was humble yet powerful. After Jesus preached the Sermon of the Mount a man with leprosy came to Him. This man bowed down before Jesus. People with leprosy were not permitted to come near anyone. The man begged for Jesus to heal him. Jesus touched him with humility but he cleansed him of the disease with His great power.
    - e. We are humble when we see ourselves next to Christ and realize we are weak.
    - f. For the sake of unity be humble before God and others.
  2. Walk in patience and tolerance.
    - a. Patience is a quality of God.
    - b. In the NT patience describes a reluctance to avenge wrongs.
    - c. To be united as a church we need a reluctance to avenge any wrongdoing.
    - d. Illus. - When we are about to lose our patience with memories of being offended, remember some of the great Christians of the past. On Paul's first missionary journey he became very angry with John Mark who left them at Pamphylia and returned to Jerusalem. On the next trip Barnabas wanted to take Mark but Paul objected so much he and Barnabas went in different directions. No division occurred over this disagreement. Later Paul wrote in 2 Tim.4:11 - Pick up Mark and bring him with you, because he is useful to me for service." Paul had patience and tolerance with Mark.
  3. Walk with diligence to preserve the unity of the Spirit.
    - a. We do not have to create unity in the church, God provides the unity.

- b. Unity was present in NT days and now we are to restore this unity Christ offers.
  - c. We are a part of a Restoration Movement to restore both unity and biblical teachings.
  - d. A desire for unity and the Bible must be held in balanced tension.
  - e. The Bible without the love of God leads to harsh legalism and love for God without the Bible leads to weakness and apathy.
- D. We walk in humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and are diligent to preserve the unity to be found worthy of our salvation in Christ.
- 1. Worthy means to be balanced.
  - 2. To be balanced means we have knowledge of God's Word and put into practice what we know.
  - 3. Balance teaching and practice.
- E. Quote - We do not become Christians by living the Christian life; rather, we live the Christian life because we are Christians.

## **II. PRESERVE THE UNITY THE HOLY SPIRIT CREATED**

- A. God's Spirit creates the unity of Christians.
- 1. Unity means we possess something in common.
  - 2. Are we all alike? Do we have the same maturity? Do we think alike? Do we all feel the same way? Do we all like the same things? Did we all repent of the same sins? Do we pray the same prayers? Do we all like the same music?
  - 3. Acts 2:38 - God gives us the Holy Spirit to live in us when as believers we repent and are baptized.
  - 4. God unites us because we possess the Holy Spirit.
- B. Paul lists the foundational stones of our unity in Christ.
- 1. One body and one Spirit
    - a. God knows who His redeemed are.
    - b. The body of Christ is the saved from the entire world.
  - 2. One hope
    - a. Our hope is God's providence here and Heaven forever.
    - b. We share a common hope to love each other here and live together in Heaven forever.

3. One Lord
  - a. Jesus is our Lord.
  - b. We all obey the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - c. Obedience brings unity.
4. One faith
  - a. Biblical faith is the one faith because the Bible is united.
  - b. God cannot be pleased with the His followers split into over 400 denominations.
  - c. Illus. - When people die young from disease, scientists study to learn the cause of the death. We need to learn all we can about life. Would it not be better to study people who live a long life? We do not need to study the causes of divisions but to study the church when it was united during the New Testament period.
5. One baptism
  - a. Baptism is the most divisive subject in Christianity.
  - b. We have divided over the form; immersion, pouring, sprinkling, and now dry cleaning.
  - c. In the NT church, baptism was a foundation for unity.
  - d. Study and accept the NT on baptism.
  - e. The one baptism was the immersion of a believer in Jesus Christ who had given his/her life to God.
6. One God
  - a. God is one and there is no other God.
  - b. The New Age Movement in our Postmodern age believes we are gods.
  - c. The original church was established on the belief of the God of the Bible who is one God.
7. One Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
  - a. We have a threefold relationship of the one God and Father to all who are his.
  - b. He is above all, His sovereignty.
  - c. He is through all, the ever-present God and Father.
  - d. He is in you, the constant indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in his people

C. Our unity is built upon the one body and Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and one Father of all.

**CONCLUSION** - An Associate Minister became a little confused when he was baptizing a friend. For some reason he was thinking of a wedding

before he did the baptism. He said, "I now pronounce you . . ." He paused for a second realizing he had used the wrong words. However, he continued, "I now pronounce you baptized." He baptized the friend to applause and laughter. Afterwards people joked with him about his mistake, "Mike, how are the baptisms?" He would reply, "Not too well but lots of requests for weddings." We take ourselves too seriously. Learn to laugh at yourself. Today I pronounce this church, "United." Let us live up to what God has created.