

# On Purpose, 6

## *United We Stand*

Chapters 18-21; July 13, 2008

### PEACE RULES

In my last message, I told you about the man who lost his arm in a tug-of-war accident; and we talked about the grim consequences that come with being *disconnected* from the body of Christ.

Today, we're going to focus on the responsibilities that come with being *connected* to the body. And they have everything to do with harmony, unity, and peace. Let's read Colossians 3:12-15 (I've changed the pronouns so that instead of me reading it "at you", we can declare it together).

Since God chose us to be the holy people he loves, we must clothe ourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. We must make allowances for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends us. The Lord forgave us, so we must forgive others. Above all, we must clothe ourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. And we must let the peace that comes from Christ rule in our hearts. For as members of one body we are called to live in peace. - *Colossians 3:12-15 NLT*

Two immediate commands stand out at the end of this passage: This peace must first "rule in our hearts". And then we must "live in peace" as a body.



As I grow in spiritual maturity and Christlikeness, my progress *will* manifest itself in my attitude and approach toward *you*. We are *commanded* to encourage. Harmony and unity and peace (in the church), are so important, so vital, that the New Testament gives more attention to the subject than to either Heaven or Hell!

Q: Do you know the *last thing* the Bible records Jesus doing before Judas betrayed Him?

A: Praying for unity and harmony for *us; this church; you and me!*

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 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. - *John 17:20-21 NIV*

Jesus uses His own relationship with God as the supreme model:

"Just as you are in me and I am in you"

The Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) is a perfect example of the harmony that Jesus desires in the church. Here's why: They are three distinct, separate beings united as One. That's good to remember: separate but united.



This is what the Lord wants for us as His body: separate but united. God wants unity not uniformity. We serve a creative Father who doesn't want *cookie cutter* kids! He enjoys that we each bring a distinct personality and perspective to His family. However, distinct, separate beings uniting as one takes effort!

Make every **effort** to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. -  
*Ephesians 4:3 NIV*

Jesus tells us what the payoff is when we play well together:

"So that the world may believe that you have sent me"



We can "witness" all we want; but, ultimately it's the way that we accept and encourage and assist one another that communicates the reality of the life-changing Gospel of Christ.

Only a warm church can coax people out of a cold world.

The way we regard one another is definitely *felt* by the people who watch us *outside* of this church, and especially by the people we bring *into* this church. And I've just gotta say something about how *common* it is for visitors to approach me after a service and comment on how much warmth and acceptance and *happiness* this congregation exudes!

That's *huge*. So, I just want to encourage you to keep it going! You *get* it. At this church, perfect people will be prosecuted! This is a place *only* for those who *admit* that they're sinners, who need of lots of grace, and who truly want to grow in faith! Unity and accord are so essential for growth and so important to Jesus, that He gives them priority *over* worship in the temple!

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother ... - *Matthew 5:23-24 NIV*



Take the initiative as soon as possible. Delay only deepens resentment. Make contact. The hardest part of reconciliation is getting the ball rolling; so email or call and just say, "Can we get together and talk about this?!" Make the first move, whether it's your fault or not.

And follow three simple, practical steps for resolution:

1. Confess your part of the conflict

Don't make excuses; go after the *truth*; admit your part in the problem. This is called "removing the log from your own eye".

2. Express your hurt with *tender* honesty



We have to own our feelings without condemning others. You want to attack the *problem*, not the *person*. If you attack, they will defend. That means we must ban all of our relational "nuclear" weapons, like condemning, insulting, comparing, belittling, and sarcasm.



We're never persuasive when we're abrasive.

Can you tell what that is? It's a roll of sandpaper instead of toilet paper! Get it? We need to be extra gentle in the tender areas.

3. Use your ears more than your mouth



You can sympathize with someone even when you disagree. And when *they* know that *you* understand how *they* feel, they are far more likely to really *listen* to how you feel.

We can walk arm in arm even when we don't see eye to eye.

We're supposed to be known by our love and mercy; so *broken* fellowship is a disgraceful testimony to unbelievers. This is why Paul was so shocked and mortified that the members of the Corinthian church were battling each other in court:

I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another – and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? - 1 Corinthians 6:5-7 NIV

If you want God's blessing on your life and you want to be known as a child of God, you must learn to be a peace "maker". In His sermon on the mount, Jesus promised:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. - Matthew 5:9 NIV

He didn't say, "Blessed are the peace *lovers*." He didn't say, "Blessed are the peace *wishers*." What He said was, "Blessed are the peace makers!" A peace "maker" is one who *works* for peace; the NLT says:

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. - Matthew 5:9 NLT

Do you put more energy into peacemaking or troublemaking? Because, we all slide to one side of the scale!

Troublemakers listen to troublemakers, and liars listen to liars. - *Proverbs 17:4 CEV*



Have you noticed how much easier it is to listen to critical gossip, and scandalous half-truths, than it is to actually *do* something to help bring healing and harmony and peace? Let's examine some of the difference between peacemakers and troublemakers:

Peacemakers overlook disagreements in minor matters. Troublemakers dispute the frivolous facets of faith. Theological conflicts in the church are often a sign that the focus has shifted from the majors to the minor trivial issues.

Peacemakers have reasonable expectations of others. Troublemakers expect everyone *else* to be just like Jesus. We'd all like to find a perfect church; but if we did they wouldn't let us join! And if they did, it wouldn't be perfect any longer!

Peacemakers choose to contribute rather than complain. Troublemakers like to stand back and pick things apart. It's the devil's job to blame and complain and condemn members of God's family. When *we* do it, we're doing his work for him.



Peacemakers refuse to listen to scornful criticisms. Troublemakers relish careless words of condemnation. We should keep this definition in mind: Gossip is condemnation as entertainment. We need the conviction and courage to say, "I know they upset you, but you're talking to the wrong person. You should tell *them* how you feel."

Q: Where are you at on the peacemaker-troublemaker scale?

If a "10" is a *peacemaker* who overlooks minor disagreements, has reasonable expectations of others, tends to contribute rather than complain, and refuses to listen to gossip ... and a "1" is a *troublemaker* who argues over trivial matters, has unreasonable expectations of others, tends to pick things apart, and gripes about others behind their backs ... What number would you rate yourself?

If we're going to live life "on purpose" we must understand:

1. I am commanded to be an encourager.

Q: What can you do *today* to lift someone's spirits?

2. Relationships are *always* worth restoring.

Q: Who do you need to reconcile with?

3. I must choose to be a peace "maker".

Q: Can you raise your rating one or two points this week?