

Purpose Driven Life, VI

United We Stand (Chpt 18-21)

March 14, 2004

COMPLETE UNITY

- The church is a body not a building.
- We are called to believe and belong.

A lot of you asked me about that tug-of-war photo on Google (the man who lost his arm in a freak accident).

Q: Did any of you search for it in Google Images this week?

It was too gruesome to show, but it made a great analogy for believers who are detached from the body of Christ. Because of the interest, we made a recreation photo. When we're attached to the body of Christ, we're each given the same responsibility to the body: to protect the unity.

Q: Did you know that on the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed a special prayer for you and me – for our unity?

My prayer is not for [the disciples] 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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 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. – John 17:20-23 NIV

Three things from this verse:

1. Just as you are in me and I am in you

The Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) is a perfect model of unity ... three distinct, separate beings united as one.

- [Likewise with us] God desires unity not uniformity

2. I have given them the glory that you gave me

We have been given the ability and opportunity to display the glory of God through unity, harmony, and peace in this body.

3. May they be *brought to* complete unity

Being "*brought to*" complete unity means that it's a process and therefore will require a cooperative effort on our part.

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

FIVE COMMUNITY EFFORTS

Let's talk about five efforts required for community unity.

1. We need to recognize disputable matters

Conflict in the church is often a sign that the focus has shifted to less important issues.

- We must major in the majors and minor in the minors.

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. - Romans 4:1 NIV

2. We need to have realistic expectations

We'd all like to find a perfect church ... but if we did they wouldn't let us join! We're called to love the church in spite of its imperfections.

Longing for the *ideal* while criticizing the *real* is immaturity; settling for the *real* without working for the *ideal* is complacency. Maturity is about learning to live with this tension.

3. We need to encourage rather than criticize

Who are you to judge someone else's servant? - Romans 14:4 NIV

We are commanded to be encouragers; it's the devil's job to blame, complain, criticize, and condemn members of God's family.

- When we do the same, we're doing Satan's work for him.

4. We need to refuse to listen to gossip

Gossip is passing on information when you are neither part of the problem nor part of the solution. Listening to gossip is like accepting stolen property. We must develop the discernment and the courage to say, "You're talking to the wrong person ... have you confronted them?"

5. We need to care enough to confront others

Q: Ever know what needs to be said, but too afraid to say it?

We gloss over tensions in order to preserve a *false* sense of peace. This creates an environment where gossip thrives.

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

- Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the peace *lovers*."
- Jesus didn't say, "Blessed are the peace *wishers*."
- What He said was, "Blessed are the peace *makers*!"

- Peacemaking is not avoiding conflict

Peacemakers don't run from problems or pretend they don't exist.

- Peacemaking is not appeasement

Peacemakers aren't doormats who allow others to run over them.

SIX PERSONAL EFFORTS

The Prince of Peace has called us to *make* peace; which begins with working to resolve the conflicts in our own lives.

- We've talked about five efforts for community unity.
- Now, let's look at six efforts for personal harmony.

1. Peacemakers vent to God first

We often look to others to make us happy (instead of God) and when they fail us, we get angry. Venting to God (as David did in the Psalms) can transform an emotion-driven-attack into a reasonable conversation.

2. Peacemakers make the first move

Restoring broken fellowship is so important to Jesus, He gives it priority over community worship.

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

Delay only deepens resentment and makes matters worse. Take the initiative to schedule a face-to-face as soon as possible.

3. Peacemakers use their ears more than their mouths

We can sympathize with how someone feels even if we don't agree.

And when they know that we understand *how* they feel, they'll be far more open to listening to *why* we disagree.

4. Peacemakers confess their part of the conflict

We should always begin by removing the log from our own eye - admitting our mistakes or sin. Peacemakers don't make excuses.

- Confession is a powerful tool for reconciliation.

5. Peacemakers attack the problem, not the person

If you attack, they'll defend. Some weapons are so destructive they're either banned (chemical and biological) or destroyed (nuclear stockpiles).

Peacemakers ban and destroy their arsenal of relational nuclear weapons: condemning, belittling, comparing, labeling, insulting, condescending, and being sarcastic.

- We're never persuasive when we're abrasive!

6. Peacemakers look for a compromise

Peacemaking has a price tag. It's unrealistic to expect everyone to agree about everything. But we can reestablish a relationship even when we're unable to resolve our differences.

- We can walk arm-in-arm without seeing eye-to-eye.

And when reconciliation is unhealthy or impossible (because of the other person) we can follow this process as much as possible so the Lord can resolve the hurt and harm in us.