

## **HOW TO BE A UNIFIED CHURCH**

### *Webnotes*

I would imagine all of us in this room have experienced at one time or another the sheer delight in being part of something where there was a tremendous spirit of unity among everyone who was involved...

Then, on the other side, I would also imagine that most if not all of us here this morning have experienced at one time or another the exact opposite. You were part of something involving other people where there was disunity, division, strife, discord, disharmony, conflict, dissonance...

Unity is extremely important, more than probably many of us realize.

Jesus prayed for it:

"... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me...I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." John 17:21,23

The psalmist extolled it:

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. Psalm 133:1

Both Paul and Peter commanded for there to be unity in the churches:

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. 1 Cor. 1:10

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind.... 1 Peter 3:8

We are told God's ultimate goal: "the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9,10). Unity flows from the essence of God himself. The Father, Son and Spirit have experienced blessed and joyful unity and harmony for all eternity. Sin created separation, division, schism, both between us and God and amongst ourselves. So Christ came to reconcile, to re-conciliate people to God and to each other. Then he entrusts to the church the ministry of reconciliation, or reuniting. This is central to our missional objective, to become agents of reconciliation. So we need to clearly understand and have it get into our very pores the biblical truth and conviction that anything that smacks of

division, disunity, discord, strife is not only terribly unsettling for those involved, but it grieves the very heart of God.

In Eph. 4:1, Paul urges Christians *"to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called."* Verse 3 says we are to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and verse 13 says that we are to attain the unity of the faith. Verse 3 – maintain unity; verse 13 – attain unity. Christ, in his act of atonement and reconciliation that he accomplished on the Cross, has already made us one – with God and with each other. There is nothing that can separate us from God, and we are all one in Christ. It's a done deal. So what Christ has accomplished we should maintain by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. Yet at the same time, the unity which Christ has achieved and has guaranteed for us, we must now live it out in the body. So from that perspective, it is that which is yet to be attained or experienced. We are to maintain the unity which Christ purchased for us, and as we work out our salvation we are to attain to the unity of the faith in our daily lives, and specifically in the church.

So if unity is so important to God because unity is of His essence, and His ultimate goal is to unify all things in Christ, both in heaven and on earth, then what might we expect from our arch-enemy, Satan himself? Of course - that he would do everything within his means to bring about disunity, strife, division, discord, separation, schism, factions. So if our goal as a church is to "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ", in other words, if our goal is to pursue having all the fullness of Christ being poured into our wineskins individually and collectively as a church then what's it going to take?

Now before we try and answer that, let's think for a few minutes about some of the things that cause division in a church.

## CAUSES OF DIVISION

### JEALOUSY AND ENVY

Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him...And his brothers were jealous of him. Gen. 37:3,4,11

While there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human? 1 Cor. 3:3-4

### PRIDE

I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. 3 John 9

#### FALSE TEACHING

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Acts 20:29,30

...there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies... 2 Peter 2:1

#### SCOFFERS

You must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions... Titus 17-19

#### GRUMBLING AGAINST LEADERSHIP

And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness!"...And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt." ...Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Numbers 14:1-4,10

#### LEGALISM

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Colossians 2:16,17

#### TRADITIONALISM

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition?" Matthew 15:1-3

#### UNRESOLVED DISAGREEMENTS

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with

me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers,  
whose names are in the book of life. Php. 4:2,3

## GROWTH

So how do we maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? It's found right there in Eph. 4, verse 2

"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love."

Humility – the wineskin of a servant; not insisting on your own way; not demanding your own preferences; not as concerned with your own interests as you are the interests of others.

Gentleness – with a reliance on the power of God's Spirit within you, seeking to be gentle with those with whom you may have a difference

Patience -

Bear with one another in love – perfect people don't need to be endured; you don't have to bear with someone who's perfectly wonderful, no, you have to bear with someone who's imperfect and sinful, just like you are.

Concluding remarks: