

Preserving Our Unity

January 11, 2009

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Ephesians 4:1-5

Sermon Summary

I. Introduce Series: The Power of Words and the Grace of God

We begin today with a message from Ephesians 4 on the subject of church unity *because biblically speaking church unity is a primary goal and fruit of honoring God with our words.*

“Our church right now is enjoying a tremendous measure of unity. Our church is flourishing in the expression of mutual love and oneness. We are washing each other's feet. There is real humility in the lives of many people. But it is so fragile and I'm always looking around the next corner, understanding that whatever it is that God puts together Satan wants to tear apart.” – John MacArthur

II. Message Main Point

Verse 3: We are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” OR as the NIV puts it: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

This text begs two questions. This first is "What is the basis of Christian unity?" And the second is "How do we keep or to maintain this unity?".

III. The basis of Christian Unity

When we read verse 3 in context we discover that the basis of true and authentic Christian unity is not in some kind of warm sentimental feeling of "oneness". Instead, our unity is rooted in *the sovereign grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.*

Authentic Christian unity is based on doctrine and not our practical or relational preferences; for according to this passage our unity is rooted in the sovereign grace of God as demonstrated in: God electing us – Ephesians chapter 1 – in God saving us – Ephesians chapter 2 – in God reconciling us to God and one another – Eph chapter 2 – and in God joining us together within the context of the church - Eph chapter 3. For only after extolling God's sovereign grace does Paul exhort us on that basis, here in chapter to four, to “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”

“To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do disrespect to the gracious reconciling work of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that his sacrificial death by which relationships with God and others have been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, are of no real consequence to us!”
- PT O'Brien

The basis of Christian unity in this passage is not only the sovereign grace of God, but it is also the work of the Holy Spirit for Paul tells us that the unity we are to maintain is the unity *of the Spirit*.

The “unity of the Spirit” does not refer to some sentimental or esoteric unity that believers should work toward. Rather, Paul is speaking of something that exists prior to the exhortation. Whether they like it or not, their lavish experience of the Spirit, which they have in common with all others who belong to Christ, has made them members of the one body of Christ, both on the larger scale and in its more immediate expression in the local community and in their own (believing) households. So they may as well get on with “liking it” and demonstrate as much by the way that they live.” – Gordon Fee

IV. How do we, practically fulfill our responsibility to keep the unity of the Spirit?

Everything we discuss in the coming weeks answers that critical question.

What is clear in this verse is that the unity God creates He expects us to do all that we can to keep or maintain.

“Paul’s appeal is urgent and cannot be easily translated into English. The verb he uses has an element of haste, urgency, or even a sense of crisis to it, and has been rendered by Barth as: ‘Yours is the initiative! Do it now!’ – P.T. O’Brien

“it means that we are to ‘spare no effort’...it is a call for continuous, diligent activity. Markus Barth expresses the sense vividly: ‘It is hardly possible to render exactly the urgency contained in the underlying Greek verb. Not only haste and passion, but a full effort of the whole man is meant, involving his will, sentiment, reason, physical strength, and total attitude. The imperative mood of the participle found in the Greek text excludes passivity, quietism, a wait-and see attitude, or a diligence tempered by all deliberate speed. Yours is the initiative! Do it now! You are to do it! Mean it—Such are the overtones of verse 3.’
– John Stott

How are we to keep the unity that God has created?

- By cultivating godly character (v2)
- By being part of a gospel-centered local church (v15)

“The apostle is not exhorting his readers to truthfulness in general or speaking honestly with one another, however appropriate or important this may be. Rather, he wants all of them to be members of a ‘confessing’ church, with the content of their testimony to be ‘the word of truth’, the gospel of their salvation (1:13). This truth, which is guaranteed by God and is depicted as part of his own armour, is the belt which believers are to buckle around their waist as they resist the onslaughts of the evil one (6:14).” – P.T. O’Brien

- By cultivating godly character with respect to the word we use (v25-32)

Questions for Reflection/Discussion:

- 1) Re-read Ephesians 4:1-6 and consider, what does this passage reveal about God’s concern for Christian unity?
- 2) Read Ephesians 2 & 3. What do these chapters inform us regarding the unity that God creates in the church? If you have an ESV Study Bible consider reading the notes on these chapters as a way to meditate on the unity God has created in the church.
- 3) What are the implications of Ephesians 4:3 for your own participation with the context of the local church?
- 4) Pray that God would meet us through this series and that God would build us even closer together through this series.