

Preserving Unity

Jonathan Banning

The church is a spectacular creation. God designed the blueprint before He designed the world (Ephesians 1:4). He hid those divine building plans from all of creation, even from the angels and demons, until the proper time came (Ephesians 3:1-10). He then adopted all the saved regardless of heritage (Ephesians 2:14-16) and subjected them as one body to our loving Savior, Jesus Christ.

And He continued to build. He gave us the revealed words of the Holy Spirit through apostles and prophets so we might know how we ought to live. He gave pastors, preachers, teachers and others with valuable talents to guide us along (Ephesians 4:11-13). Why did God do all of this? To unify the saved. God's ultimate purpose for the church is unity with Him and with one another.

Do you want to know something remarkable? God put you and me in charge of protecting that unity. Ephesians 4:3 implores us to be, "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." God made it our job to keep unity alive. My actions can help build what God created, but they also can damage what He has built. Our efforts can strengthen the bond we share in Christ, or they can tear us apart. We're capable of both.

Thankfully, the apostle tells us what is required of me to preserve what God created. He tells us in Ephesians 4:2. To preserve unity in this church...

...I must be humble.

Paul tells us to walk with all humility, to live our lives with lowliness. This does not mean a Christian ought to live with little to no self-confidence, rather it means that the Christian genuinely possesses a greater regard for others than for himself (Philippians 2:3). In all relationships, seeking my own good above the good of another creates conflict and severs unity.

True humility produces an environment where love can ripen and relationships are strengthened. Humble people do selfless things; things that bind us tighter. Humble people don't let an offense or an insult wreck a relationship. Humble people don't let a disagreement become ugly conflicts or seeds of bitterness. Humble churches don't suffer schisms or splits. Be diligent to be humble.

...I must be gentle.

He also tells us to walk with all gentleness. Gentleness is warmth. Gentleness is soft

and careful. Gentleness is thoughtful and considerate. Christ showed us gentleness in John 8 when He encountered a woman caught in adultery. Gentleness is not permissiveness or a lack of rebuke. It is tender care concerned with what is best for someone else.

Gentleness brings people together. It strengthens bonds. We naturally gravitate toward those who treat us tenderly. Paul knew that. He strove to be gentle as he traveled the world teaching Christians (1 Thessalonians 2:7), even when the Christians he met were stubborn and frustrating. Ultimately, that's the challenge when it comes to gentleness, isn't it? We have no trouble with tenderly caring for those who have been kind, or easy to deal with, or those who are gentle with us. Yet, true gentleness, like justice, is blind. It is dispensed to those who treat you kindly, and those who treat you harshly. It is felt by those who have helped you and those who have not. It is given to those you consider honorable and dishonorable. And only true gentleness, that is gentleness shown when we'd like to be harsh, preserves unity. Be diligent to be gentle.

...I must be patient.

Finally, Paul tells me I must be patient. He explains what patience means in the following phrase, "showing tolerance for one another in love." Patience is when you stick around and put up with my bad behavior because you love me. You show patience when you hold me tight even when I let you down or hurt your feelings.

Patience is different from the other two qualities mention above. Humility and gentleness draw us to one another. Those characteristics are attractive, magnetic. Patience holds us together through those times we find each other unattractive, even repulsive. Patience keeps the body together when the members fail to emulate Christ. Be diligent to be patient.

May I say one more thing? Do it all according to the truth (Ephesians 4:15). Love keeps us together, but the truth brought us together at the first.