

January 31, 2016

Jesus and his Church

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called in one hope, when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

Ephesians 4:1-6

The Apostle Paul is a great preacher. He never gives us anything theoretical without also giving us the practical application. In the first three chapters of his letter to the believers at Ephesus he has reminded us of our salvation through God's grace at work in our faith, and he has called on us to enter into a more intimate and personal relationship with the Father through the church which is the body of Christ. He has reminded us that in the body we are one, regardless of how or who we started out as.

So now, in chapter four, the Apostle writes, ***"Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bod of peace."*** As we discussed last week, if we lose our unity and allow our relationships to be splintered we fail as those who follow Jesus. It is in our relationships that we demonstrate that we do, in fact, follow the Master. So, Paul begs us to keep our unity; to make every effort to hold on to our unity.

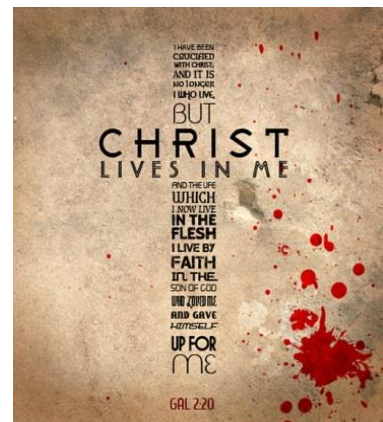
In giving us the practical tools to make this possible the Apostle says, ***"Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love."*** Or efforts to hold on to our unity do not begin with getting others to cooperate. These efforts begin with us. We must become completely humble and gentle. These are not, as we have already noted, attributes that we occasionally manage to accomplish. Rather, the Holy Spirit is at work in us to create in us a nature that is humble and gentle.

Humility is born in us when we realize that we are not in any way better than anyone else. That's a core issue for a lot of us isn't it? We feel that we are better that someone else. We are better than the poor because we have wealth. We are better than the illiterate because we have education. We are better that the rest of the world because we are Americans.

We all struggle with this idea that we are better than, more important than, more deserving than someone else. If we understand grace at all, we know that we have no claim to 'better' than anyone else. Why? We are, without exception, nothing more or less than sinners condemned by our own choices. That realization, when we face it honestly, should be completely humbling.

In turn the humility our true situation creates in us makes us hugely gentle and patient. When I have suffered and struggled with sin and temptation and failed, then I can be gentle and patient with others. When I wrongly believe that I have not and do not struggle with sin and temptation then I will be anything, but gentle and patient.

So, Paul shows us the road by which the Spirit will lead us to become humble, gentle and patient. And then he shows us the basics of our unity. In our faith what is it we all have in common? This is a pretty unique approach to unity. In practice, we generally begin reaching out to



someone we might let into our fellowship by looking at how we differ. The Apostle focuses on the things that all of us who follow Jesus believe. ***"There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called in one hope. When you were called—one Lord, one faith, on baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."*** These are the basic tenants of our faith, the fundamental beliefs common to nearly all of those who call themselves Christians. Paul is, I think, telling us that unity is achievable when we stay focused on the basics and avoid chasing all of the minute differences that separate us.

"Make every effort..." is not an easy challenge. Paul believes that unity is so essential, so absolutely necessary to our faith, that we must do everything and nearly anything we can to preserve it.