

May 3, 2015

The Church

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worth 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 in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope, when you were called—on Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all...It was he (Jesus) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ..."
Ephesians 4:1-5:2

God created relationships for us because as he observed, ***"It is not good for the man to be alone..."*** (Genesis 2:18) He gives us marriage, family and the church because we do not do well when we are alone. Making these relationships work effectively is integral to glorifying the Father. Relationships that break down reflect poorly on the Father and make our faith dishonest.

The word that underlies everything that the Apostle Paul will write about making these relationships function well is "unity". If our marriages, families, and churches splinter we fail the Father. In the rest of his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle will explain how we maintain our unity in these relationships and how we let them bring glory to God.

In our context for today Paul addresses unity in the church. He begs the Ephesian believers to ***"...make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*** Any time we read the phrase, ***"...make every effort..."***, in Scripture it literally means we have to get it done; this is a direct and specific command.

The way to maintain unity is clear. The Apostle writes, ***"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another..."*** Humility is a poured-out attitude. In his letter to the believers in Philippi Paul pens this about Jesus, ***"Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!"*** (Philippians 2:6-8)

When we are completely humble and servant-minded, gentleness is much, much easier. Patience is also easier when everything doesn't have to be about me. I can bear with or more literally, put up with a lot when the interests of others are more important to me than my own. As a member of the body of Christ I reflect the head best when I have made myself nothing. Keeping our unity in relationship in the church is always my first choice.

That does not mean that I should turn a blind eye on the sin in the lives of those I love. Always remembering that I am a sinner in need of grace, I must still gently seek to correct those traveling down a destructive path. Love demands nothing less. Being patient and gentle does not equate with standing by while others are destroyed by sin. ***"Speaking the truth in love..."*** becomes the mechanism by which we maintain unity and still partner together to overcome sin.