

PEACE AND UNITY IN THE CONGREGATION

Compiled by Walton Weaver

INTRODUCTION:

- A. Jesus promised peace to his disciples, Jn. 16:13; cf. 14:27.
- B. The gospel is a gospel of peace, Rom. 10:15.
 - 1. First, Christ himself "came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near" (Eph. 2:17).
 - 2. Through faith, which comes through hearing the word of God, Paul says we are justified and "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1).
- C. This peace is a *result* of the remission of sins, redemption, reconciliation, or as Paul said in Rom. 5:1, justification.
 - 1. This has been made possible (we are at peace with God) only because our wills have been made subject to the will of God (cf. 2 Cor. 10:2-6).
 - 2. Through our obedience to the gospel of peace we have been brought into a harmonious relationship to God again.
 - a. Every person who has rendered initial obedience to the gospel like the Romans (Rom. 6:17-18) are made to be at peace with God through Jesus Christ.
 - b. At that time they become "one" — one in Christ (Rom. 6:3) and one with Christ (Rom. 6:4-9).

II. OUTWARD DIFFERENCES NO LONGER MATTER.

- A. All are made "one" in Christ at the foot of the cross.
 - 1. Racial differences are gone, Acts 10:35-38; Eph. 2:14-17 ("one new man, thus making peace," v. 14).
 - 2. Male/female, bond/free, all are "one," Gal. 3:26-29.
- B. But are we "one" in relation to each other? We are when we first come into the body of Christ.
 - 1. But this "oneness" will not continue without work on our part.
Continued oneness in relation to one another is not automatic.
 - 2. God desires that we be one, and it is within the realm of possibility, but it is something that we must desire, and we must work hard to maintain it.
 - 3. This is the subject of our lesson tonight. We wish to begin with this question:

III. WHAT MAKES THIS KIND OF UNITY SO DESIRABLE?

- A. The very fact that we *can't please God without it* makes it desirable.
 - 1. God hates the one who sows discord among brethren, Prov. 6:16-19.
 - 2. God cannot be pleased with division or he would not command unity as he does, 1 Cor. 1:10; Rom. 12:16; Rom. 14:19; 1 Thess. 5:13.

3. A true Christian can find no pleasure in that which displeases the Lord. His aid is always to please the Lord, Col. 1:10; 2 Cor. 5:9; 2 Tim. 2:4.
- B. Division is *unpleasant*, Psa. 133:1.
 1. Where division exists *worship is made a task instead of a pleasure*.
 - a. Psa. 122:1, "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."
 - b. Psa. 24:4, "One thing I have desired of the Lord, That will I seek: That I may dwell in the house of the Lord All the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, And to inquire in his temple."
 2. Home life is also unpleasant where division exists.
- C. Division *hinders the progress of the gospel*. Fail to convert neighbors, etc. Jesus' prayer, Jn. 17:20-21.
- D. Division *leads to other sins*, Gal. 5:15; Jas. 3:16.
- E. *Good people ruined* where division exists. People become discouraged, inactive and drift away. Some destroyed for whom Christ died, Rom. 14:15.

IV. HOW MUCH EFFORT MUST BE PUT FORTH TO MAINTAIN PEACE AND UNITY IN THE CONGREGATION?

- A. Paul says we must "*endeavor*" (*spoudazontes*), or "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. 4:3 (ASV).
 1. This word emphasizes the exertion of energy, in the sense of making haste: "be diligent to come to me quickly" (2 Tim. 4:9); "do your utmost to come before winter" (2 Tim. 4:21, NKJV).
 2. Sometimes it means giving oneself toward reaching an objective: aiding the poor (Gal. 2:10); assisting other Christians in need (2 Cor. 8:6-9, 16); righting a wrong (2 Cor. 7:11ff.).
 3. Leaders are to lead "with diligence" (Rom. 12:8); Christians are not to lag behind in "diligence" but should be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). Christians must give "all diligence" to develop the Christian graces (2 Pet. 1:5ff.).
- B. This word, then, shows that *strenuous effort* must be put forth by each Christian if unity is to be maintained in the local church.

V. WHAT DESTROYS UNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. *Insisting upon our personal opinions* may destroy the unity in a local church.
 1. Cannot require that our personal opinions be shared by everyone else.
 2. Must "receive" those "weak in the faith," but "not to disputes over doubtful things" (Rom. 14:1). To do otherwise would be to cause the "weak" brother to sin (Rom. 14:23).
 3. Neither is the weak brother to judge (condemn) the brother whose conscience is not as restrictive as his own (Rom. 14:3-4).
 4. Some matters, at least, are matters about which "every man must be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:3-5).

5. Cf. my own conviction on singing hymns with inst. music outside of congregational worship.
 6. Must distinguish as personal matter from a congregational practice.
 7. "My right" must not always be insisted upon. Paul had the "right" to marry and to get support, but gave himself as an example as one who did not insist upon these rights (1 Cor. 9:5ff.)
- B. *Selfishness* destroys the unity in a local church.
1. Is this not a leading cause for some insisting upon their opinions?
 - a. Some are determined to have their way at all costs. **ILLUS.:** Church building new building. Difference over whether to use one or two panes in windows. Became so divisive over the matter, the "one pane" brethren and "two pane" brethren sat on different sides in auditorium during worship!.
 - b. In matters of judgment all will not agree.
 - c. In such matters someone must yield. Even an elder is not to be "self-willed" (Titus 1:7).
 2. Read Rom. 15:1 with v.7. Too many of us are only concerned about pleasing ourselves.
 3. Must one be perfect (i. e., agree with me on everything) before I can accept him as a brother? Must make some allowance for immaturity. How imperfect were you when you first became a Christian?
 4. When we discover a "new truth" (?), or when we draw a conclusion on a subject we have not previously held, are we as patient with those who do not agree with us now (they still believe what I believed before) as others were with us before we changed our view? Remember, we held the other view for years.
- C. *Difference in personalities* may destroy unity in a local church.
1. Timothy was not a Paul, and Paul was not an Apollos (1 Cor. 16:10-11; Acts 18:24; 2 Cor. 10:10).
 2. Which would you have wanted in the pulpit in this church?
 3. Those who serve as elders differ in personalities.
 4. Must look upon all as faithful stewards when they are faithful in their work (see 1 Cor. 4:1-6).
- D. *Being soon angry* may destroy unity in a local church.
1. Some have explosive tempers which can be ignited with very little spark.
 2. Turn one of these loose in a business meeting, let someone cross him and then run for cover.
 3. Paul said to put off anger (Col. 3:8). "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).
- E. *A desire for preeminence* may destroy the unity in a local church.
1. "Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them" (3 Jn. 9).
 2. Some men are natural born leaders. If you don't think so, just ask them!
 3. Some men (and women) are determined to run things or else they will not play. Not satisfied to be a laborer, they must be a supervisor.

- F. Things like *social, racial, and sexual differences* may also destroy the unity in a local church. Cf. the Jew/Gentile problem in the Galatian churches (Gal. 5:15 and the rich/poor problem addressed by James (Jas. 2:1ff.).
- G. *Self-justification* may destroy the unity in a local church.
 - 1. It is difficult for some to admit wrong.
 - 2. A position is taken, wrong words are said, and rather than admit wrong, or confess the error, one begins to justify himself. If we have wronged someone, we must have the spirit to confess, as the prodigal son did, "I have sinned."
 - 3. Note the problem between the two women in the church at Philippi (Phil. 4:2-3). Others had to become involved to get these two reconciled. If not settled soon it could quickly become a church problem.

VI. WHAT ATTITUDES MUST THE MEMBERS CULTIVATE THAT WILL PROMOTE UNITY IN THE LOCAL CHURCH?

- A. Will look at the list from Eph. 4:2 and Col. 3:13-14.
- B. *Lowliness of mind*. Low estimate of self founded on consciousness of guilt and weakness. No desire to be exalted, but willing to be low, unnoticed, upraised.
- C. *Gentleness*. Softness and mildness united with strength. Meekness is that "unresisting, uncomplaining disposition of mind, which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of others" (Charles Hodge).
- D. *Longsuffering*. Willingness to suffer long; "self-restraint which does not hastily retaliate a wrong" (Thayer). Closely related is the term *forbearance*. We are to "bear with [endure] one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). Our love for one another causes us to endure each other's imperfections.
- E. *Compassion*. We have deep feelings for each other. cf. how we feel toward our own family members. Not looking for faults and weaknesses.
- F. *Kindness*. Opposite of harshness, sharpness and bitterness. Should have expressions of good will toward each other.
- G. *Forgiveness*. Must have an inclination to forgive or pardon. Have no resentment against or a desire to punish. Read Col. 3:13. If not willing to forgive, will not be forgiven ourselves (Matt. 6:14-15).

CONCLUSION:

A. Brother Connie Adams wrote, "Sometimes brethren boast that they are at peace when in reality they are dead. The church at Sardis had a name that it lived but was dead (Rev. 3:1). One brother boasted that the congregation had no friction. Another who knew the congregation well suggested that it takes moving parts to have friction. There are congregations that just need someone to come and preach their funeral."

B. Sometimes the greatest problem in a church where there is strife and division is a failure to meet the problem head-on. Note Paul's instruction in Rom. 16:17 and Tit. 3:10.

Special Note: I am indebted to Connie Adams and another person or two for much of the material in this outline. I have lost track of the source of the articles, but I believe they were in *Searching the Scriptures* and/or the *Gospel Guardian* — Walton Weaver