

EPHESIANS

KEEP THE UNITY



SUPPLEMENTAL VERSES

Romans 12:1

Col 1:10

John 13:35

2 Cor 2: 15-16

Jude 1: 3-4

Acts 15: 1-11

Acts 15: 19-20

John 17: 20-23

REVIEW: THE CHURCH IS GOD'S MYSTERY NOW REVEALED

In Chapter 2, Paul began talking about the church.

He says that the church is God's mystery that was hidden in ages past, but now is being disclosed.

It's a mystery that God has entrusted to Paul to make clear and to explain.

The church is the new thing that God is doing. It is a place where Jew & Gentile will come together and worship God.

People from every tribe, tongue, and nation are going to be standing together praising God!

This was unheard of at this time...it was radical! Why do you think this was so radical?

DIFFERENCES EMERGE

What happens when you bring Jew & Gentile & people from every tribe, nation, language, together?

Differences emerge!

People have different backgrounds, culture...different ideas, different mindsets...people are in a different places spiritually.

There are non believers, young believers, maturing believers, etc.

Paul says in Chapter 3...for this reason...I kneel before the Father...and then He prays for the church again!

This brings us to Chapter 4 and his discussion about keeping the unity.

LIVE A LIFE THAT IS WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING!

Let's read Chapter 4:1-6

In verse 1...Paul reminds them that he is a prisoner for the Lord. He is in prison, right in the center of God's will.

Why do you think he reminds them of that as he writes this sentence?

“Live a life worthy of the calling that you have received”

Paul was living a life worthy of the calling, even while he was in prison!

It doesn't matter where you & are...or what circumstances are in...we are to live a life worthy of His calling!

What exactly does that mean?

REMEMBERING WHO WE ARE

In the Lion King...after King Mufasa dies, his son, Simba feels guilty and runs away. He ends up in a strange land with some weird friends...and he begins living a care free life. Hakuna Matata...No worries right? No problems!

What happened to Simba? He was not living the life that he was destined for. He was the King's son and the heir to the throne! He abandoned that calling in his life.

One day he was looking into a pond and He has a vision of his father. His father says "Remember who you are!" Simba was the king's son...and he was the future king...Mufasa is telling him to live in light of this destiny!

That's kind of what Paul is saying...Remember who you are! You are a child of God and a servant of Jesus Christ. Live a life worthy of this!

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LIVE A “WORTHY” LIFE

The word that Paul uses here for “worthy” means to “balance”.

It gives the idea of a scale where people weighed things in a balance.

Because God has done so much for you, you should live a life that is keeping in “balance” with that. Your life should balance that out.

God has sacrificed so much for you...He sacrificed everything...including His one and Only Son.

Your life should honor Him back with a sacrifice of service.

Romans 12:1 I urge you brothers & sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.

Col 1:10 And we pray that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.

Remember who you are!!! You are sons and daughters of the Most High! Seek to please Him in everyway and live a life worthy of His calling!

MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE UNITY

Let's skip verse 2 for a minute and move on to verse 3.

Verse 3: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

The Church is God's new plan. Jews & Gentiles coming together to worship God. People from every tribe, language, nation.

There are going to be so many differences. Different cultures, ideologies, different ways of thinking and making decisions.

In light of those differences...we need to "make every effort to keep the unity" The word means to "strive"...to work hard at...To make intense, purposeful, and persistent effort. To fight for...struggle for!

WHAT IS UNITY?

Unity is not uniformity!

We don't all have to look alike, dress alike, like the same things, etc.

We are different...we are all unique! God created us all different for a reason.

He wants Unity with Uniqueness!

What is Unity?

Unity is the state of being joined as a whole. It's being of one heart, one mind, one accord...moving in the same direction, with one common purpose.

WHY IS UNITY SO IMPORTANT?

Unity reflects the nature of the Trinity. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. 3 distinct persons acting in one accord.

Unity reflects the church's witness to the world and is necessary to fulfill God's mission for it!

How will all men know that you are my disciples? By how good your worship is? By how good your preaching is? By how nice your building is? No!

John 13:35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

When the world sees a unified body of believers...loving God, loving each other, and serving Him...it reflects Him and His great love!

2 Cor 2:15-16 For we are the sweet aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing...to the latter an odor...from death to death...but to the former a fragrance of life to life.

SADLY, THE CHURCH HAS NOT DONE A GREAT JOB WITH UNITY THROUGHOUT THE YEARS

John Ortenberg notes: “No organization has fought more or split more bitterly than the church.”

Did you know that there are more than 100 different types of Baptists? There are Northern Baptists, Southern Baptists, General Baptists, Particular Baptists, 7th Day Baptists, Free Will Baptists, Missionary Baptists to name a few.

Ortenberg notes that there was a denomination called “The Church of God”. Some people got mad and split off and started another church called “The True Church of God”. Then some others got mad and split off and started another church called “The Only True Church of God”

One researcher noted that in the 20th Century there were more than 33,000 denominations of Christianity.

Each born out of a church split! These splits were characterized by anger, hostility & withdrawal.

WHY ALL OF THE CHURCH SPLITS?

Differences!

People from every tribe, nation, language, background and differing levels of knowledge of the Scripture and spiritual maturity all coming together in this Body of Believers called the Church!

How do we navigate all of these differences? Differences in thinking, ideologies, interpretations of scriptures, ways that we should practice our faith?

Paul says we have to strive to keep the unity! We have to contend for unity! We have to work hard at it! We have to make intense, purposeful, consistent effort to keep the unity!

HOW DO WE KEEP THE UNITY? FOCUSING ON THOSE BELIEFS THAT UNITE US!

Verses 4 -6

There is one body, and one Spirit-just as you were called to one hope, -one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is overall and through all and in all.

Paul lists 7 beliefs that unify us as believers.

7 THINGS THAT UNIFY US

1. One Body: Family of God, every believer, the church
2. One Spirit: The Holy Spirit
3. One Hope: The hope that we will see him face to face and live in His presence
4. One Lord: Jesus
5. One Faith: One system of beliefs, one doctrine, one truth faith
6. One Baptism: One water baptism where we proclaim our faith publicly
7. One God & Father: Jehovah God, Yahweh.

Paul says these 7 things unify us as believers in Christ...Keep these things paramount

CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

In the book of Jude...Jude writes to believers:

Jude 1: 3-4 : Dear Friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write to you and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people...

Why is Jude asking them to contend for the faith? Because people had begun distorting the faith, and teaching false things. Godless men were changing the grace of God for a license to do whatever they wanted...and they even denied who Jesus was.

These distortions were meant to deceive people and split them off from the church to follow false teachers! The work of Satan is to steal, kill, and destroy. Getting churches to have dissent, fights, & splits is part of His working.

The early church had to contend...strive to keep the unity of the faith because so many were trying to distort it.

EARLY CHURCH DEVELOPED CREEDS IN ORDER TO HELP KEEP THE UNITY

In AD 325, the Council of Nicaea was convened to address distortions that were being taught by Arius and became known as Arianism.

The teaching of Arius denied the full divinity of Christ.

The council condemned this teaching and developed the Nicene Creed as a response.

The goal: to provide a doctrinal statement of correct beliefs for Christians, and to ensure that we are united in those beliefs.

THE NICENE CREED

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us men for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets. And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

THE APOSTLE'S CREED

The Apostle's Creed showed up around AD 340 and became formalized by the 8th Century.

It was also a response to false teachings that were creeping into the church.

This one is more widely used by most denominations of Christianity and helps to articulate what Christians believe.

APOSTLE'S CREED

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
and born of the virgin Mary.
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.
From there he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Christian church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

IF THESE THINGS UNITE US... WHY ARE THERE STILL DIVISIONS AMONG US?

The Apostle's Creed and the Nicene Creed lay out what we will refer to as First Level Theological Issues that unite us!

First Level issues deal with the fundamental truths of the Christian Faith. Always included in these issues are: The Trinity, Full Deity & Humanity of Christ, Justification by Faith, Authority of Scripture, etc. Believing all of these things is essential to being a Christian.

However, as the Church progressed, other issues that we will refer to as "second and third level" issues began to be spring up.

2ND & 3RD LEVEL DOCTRINES

Second level issues are doctrines that are essential for ordering of church life...but do not define the Gospel. Issues such as Baptism (dunking vs sprinkling), Women in leadership, communion (should we use grape juice or wine...crackers or bread), etc.

Third level issues are those which may be a ground for fruitful theological discussion, but shouldn't threaten fellowship. Issues such as Eschatology, Free will vs Predestination, Timing of Christ's Return, Pretrib vs Posttrib Rapture, Millennialism, etc.

The problem exists when people get so passionate about a 2nd level or 3rd level doctrine, that they try to elevate it to a first level doctrine.

EXAMPLE FROM THE EARLY CHURCH

Should Gentile Christians be circumcised and have to follow the laws of Moses to be saved?

Where would this issue fall in our model of theological issues?

Level 1. Why...because it is an issue to speaks to how people are saved. How are people saved? By grace...through faith. This is how the Apostles and elders responded to this issue. Lets read Acts 15: 1-11.

Answer...Salvation is by grace through faith...not by following the laws of Moses.

After this issue is decided...The council, however, recommends certain things for the new believers to do: Acts 15: 19-20. Where would these things fall in our model of theological issues? Level 2...because they concern how Christians practice their faith. Not eating foods that have been sacrificed to idols or foods animals that have been strangled.

HOW DO WE KEEP THE UNITY? IT STARTS WITH OUR OWN ATTITUDES & CHRISTLIKENESS

Back to verse 2: Be completely humble, gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love.

In order to have Unity...Paul says it starts with our own attitudes:

1. We have to be humble: this involves putting others first!
2. We have to be gentle: this involves the way we speak to one another and deal with one another.
3. We have to be patient: this involves waiting and praying for each other until we can come to agreement. We need to be long suffering.
4. We have to bear with one another: this involves hanging in there, even when it is tough or not pleasant. It means putting up with each others differences.

LOVE IS A DECISION

When we come to these differences with each other...we have a decision to make.

Am I going to choose to love this person despite these differences? Am I going to choose Unity over my personal preferences?

Love is a decision that we make to walk with someone through the difficulties.

Paul says that we need to bear with one another to keep the unity, being humble, gentle, and patient...making a decision to love someone through the differences so that unity is protected.

How will all men know that you are my disciples? By the way you love one another!
John 13:35

JESUS ALSO PRAYED FOR UNITY

John 17: 20-23 ...I pray that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you in me...so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Unity is paramount for Christ's church. It is paramount for non-believers to see...it is paramount for new believers to see and feel as they engage in the church...it is paramount for mature believers to practice and to prioritize!

Jesus Prayed for it & Paul urged the Ephesian Church to make every effort to keep the unity!

We need to focus on those beliefs that unite us, One Faith, One Hope, One Baptism, One Body, One Lord, One Spirit, One God and Father of All...and we need to be humble, gentle, patient, and bear with one another in love as differences emerge. We need to prioritize keeping the unity!