

How Do We Preserve the Unity of the Spirit in this Congregation?

➤ = next PowerPoint slide

Intro:

- I recently talked with a brother in Christ who told me he had been going to a congregation where there were problems
 - congregation not unified, split, some started a new congregation
 - got me thinking about unity
- - **Jn. 17:20-23** Jesus prayed for unity, the night he was betrayed, that all people who believed in Him through the apostles word would be one, and be in the Father and the Son, as the Father and Son are in one another
- - the Lord's church was established by Christ as a unified body (**Eph. 4:1-6**)
 - **Eph. 4:4-6** basis of unity - one. . . .
- - as Christians, we are obligated to preserve the unity
 - **Eph. 4:3a** diligent, preserve unity of the Spirit
- **How do we preserve the unity of the Spirit in this congregation?**
 - **note:** to my knowledge, our congregation is unified and there are no problems, so now is a good time to preach on this topic

- To preserve unity, **we must walk in a manner worthy of our calling** – behave
 - **Eph. 4:1-3** when our behavior is worthy of our calling, we'll be unified with faithful brethren
 - **vs. 2-3 behaviors:** humility, gentleness, showing tolerance (forbearing) in love, diligent, bond of peace
 - **tolerance (forbearing): implications regarding areas that do not transgress God's law**
 - **people in the congregation are going to do things** you don't like, or necessarily agree with
 - **you are doing to do things** other people in the congregation don't like, or necessarily agree with
 - **illus.: family** must exhibit these attitudes and behaviors, especially as children grow into adulthood
 - e.g., **things Beth and girls do** I may not prefer, or agree with, but are not sinful
 - e.g., **things I do** they may not prefer or agree with
 - **saying: marriage is 50/50**

- - **Philippians: behaviors necessary for unity**
 - **Phil. 1:27-28** unified in spirit and mind, strong in the face of adversity
 - **vs. 27a** standing firm in one spirit, with one mind
 - **once a decision is made in a matter of liberty, we all stand by it, unified, even if it's not our preference**
 - **illus.: my preference, calling assembly on Sunday "Gospel Meeting", but not sin, I agree with others, unified**
 - **vs. 27b** striving together for the faith of the gospel
 - **more important than getting our way, and the result of being unified**
 - **vs. 28** not alarmed by your opponents, sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you
 - **confidence that results, the message sent to others by our unity and steadfastness**

- - **Phil. 2:1-5** don't be selfish or conceited, but be humble – **put others first**
 - **vs. 1** encouragement in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of the Spirit, affection and compassion
 - **vs. 2** being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose
 - **vs. 3** not selfishness or conceited, humble, regard one another as more important than yourselves
 - **vs. 4** don't look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others
 - **vs. 5** be humble, like Jesus

- - **Phil. 2:12-13** obey, work out salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you

- - **Phil. 2:14-16** not grumbling or disputing, holding fast word of life, saved

- **unity is the result of everyone behaving as God teaches in His word**
 - **when everyone behaves properly, there is unity**
 - **when one person behaves improperly, and is not disciplined, strife and discord result**

- To preserve unity, **everyone must be working together**
 - **Eph. 4:11-13a** purpose of elders' oversight and teaching in the church, teaching in the church, unity of the faith, knowledge, maturity
- - **Eph. 4:15-16** speaking truth in love, body unified, each part working together, growth of the body, building up of itself in love
 - **illus.: a congregation is like a team, each player must do his part for the team to succeed**
 - **football:** if the linemen always missed their blocks, the running backs couldn't run the ball into the end zone and score, and the quarterback wouldn't have time to throw the ball – they'd lose
 - **congregation** needs each member unified with all the others, and doing their work, to succeed as a cooperative group of God's people – **each person is important, has important work**
- To preserve unity, **each member must be treating the other members properly**
 - **speech**
 - **Eph. 4:25, 29, 31b**
 - - **quickly resolving issues that result in anger and bitterness**
 - **Eph. 4:26-27, 31a**
 - - **sharing with those who have need**
 - **Eph. 4:28**
 - - **kind, tender-hearted, forgiving**
 - **Eph. 4:32**
 - **forgiving: implications** regarding the command to forgive brethren
 - **people in the congregation are going to sin against each other** sometimes
 - **you may be the one who sins against a brother**
 - **be ready to forgive**, when a brother repents and asks forgiveness – **no one is perfect** (without sin)
- **illus.: family**
 - **all the members constantly** yell and scream at each other, mad at everyone and holding grudges, caring about no one but themselves while letting everyone else suffer, unforgiving – **cannot be unified**
 - **not until each family member starts treating the others properly, can the family be unified**
 - **so it is with the church**
 - **where brethren** are mad and angry, constant turmoil, holding grudges against each other, caring about no one but themselves while others suffer, unforgiving, **there cannot be unity**
 - **not until each member starts treating other members properly, can the congregation be unified**
- **a unified congregation is one where people feel at ease, because they're treated right**
 - **where everyone is treated equal**, and there is not an partisan
 - **where everyone feels equally important and needed**, because they are
 - **where everyone is edified and encouraged** at every assembly
 - **where you want to be, and want to worship, and want to work**

➤ **A few things that destroy unity** – things we should watch for in ourselves and others

- **sin** - sin destroys unity

- **sin in general: unless a congregation reacts and reproves a member who is in sin**, and then disciplines members who refuse to repent, the congregation will **suffer from discord – internal strife**

- **1 Cor. 5:6** a little leaven leavens the whole lump

- **solution: teaching, reproof, rebuking, discipline**

- **sins aimed at causing division**

- **complaining, grumbling, gossiping, and backbiting**

- **solution: be part of the solution rather than not part of the problem**

- **be loving and kind and tolerant, putting others before self**

- **talk to people face to face**, not behind their back

- **talk with the elders and help make positive changes**, rather than just complaining and hurting others

- **sin hurts**

- **the person** committing it

- **God**, grieves the Holy Spirit

- **the church**

- **everyone who has knowledge of it**, believers and unbelievers

➤ - **false teaching**

- **Jude 1:19** false teachers cause divisions, worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit

- **difference between holding to a view that's wrong, but is studying**, verses trying to undermine the elders' authority and teach false doctrine

- **a person who is wrong would study with the elders**, learn the truth over time, without causing problems or divisions in the congregation

- **suggestions:**

- **if you are entertaining an idea and studying through it, don't talk about it publically, would help to talk with elders first, so that division doesn't "accidentally" occur**

- **some congregations have been divided on accident**, by brethren with good intentions, but things got out of hand and couldn't be contained

- **talk to the elders before teaching anything that's out of the "norm" or "questionable"**

- **Bible teachers should be aware of issues that could cause a problem** – seek advise from elders before teaching

- - **pushing personal beliefs that may not result in damnation when handled properly, but cause division when handled improperly**
 - **Rom. 1-16** epistle written in part to straighten out contentions between Jews and Gentiles, and how to be unified
 - **Rom. 14** deals with matters of opinions, and not pushing personal beliefs on brethren resulting in sin, but be tolerant of one another's opinions and conscience
 - **illus.: a few brethren believe in realized eschatology**, 70 AD doctrine of the final resurrection
 - **Mt. Dora congregation** when we were members, resulted in some falling away and dissolving the congregation
 - **other places handled correctly**, peace and unity continued
 - **illus.: young folks studying social drinking**
 - sometimes you hear of small groups of young folks get together for study and the leader suggests social drinking is lawful
 - **creates a problem in the congregation** because teaching doctrine elders don't agree with
 - **some kids experiment with alcohol**, problems arise
 - **solution: group leader talk with elders** first, before teaching peers it's okay to drink alcohol
 - **illus.: head covering issue**
 - **many brethren handle this issue properly**, unity preserved in a congregation with people having differing views
 - **illus.: serving the Lord's Supper at night**
 - **Thomasville when we were members**, different beliefs in the topic, handled so that there were no problems and unity preserved
 - **illus.: qualifications of elders as it relates to their children**
 - **3 major views held by brethren**, could cause divisive if not handled correctly
 - **personally, before teaching on the topic I went to the elders to get their position**
 - **illus.: role play**
 - a man becomes a member who believes we should pray to Jesus during the Lord's Supper
 - **what should he do**
 - start asking questions about it in class
 - start talking about it with members
 - work it into a class he's teaching, and present his view
 - start praying to Jesus when presiding over the Lord's Supper
 - talk privately with the elders
 - **anything less would be disrespectful to the elders, and potentially divisive**
 - **suggestions:**
 - **if you are entertaining an idea that you've not heard expressed before or you already know is controversial, don't talk about it with other members until after you run it by the elders and get their counsel**

preserve unity: walk worthy of calling, everyone working together, everyone treating each other right
destroys unity: sin, false teaching, pushing personal beliefs

➤ - cliques

- **sometimes hear someone say of a congregation, “they are cliquish”**
 - **means they are broken up in small “exclusive” groups**, rather than being a single congregation
 - **have to work hard not to be cliquish**, especially the larger the congregation
 - **illus.: Corinth was divided** - composed of cliques
 - **1 Cor. 1:10-13** making doctrinal distinctions based on religious names
 - **1 Cor. 11:20-21** by eating the Lord’s Supper with some and not with others

- **families within a congregation can easily create cliques**
 - **blessing from God** to worship with family (kids, grandkids, cousins, brothers and sisters), but have to watch out for **potential problems**
 - **illus.: like financial wealth**, going to church with a lot of family is a blessing, but can result in problems if not handled properly
 - **easy to only greet and visit with family, not circulate** evenly and consistently throughout the congregation
 - **easy to locate in a central location (building), and talk *family talk* to exclusion** of other members
 - **illus.: after Allen and Pam are married, not seen them all week. . . .**
 - **easy to have “inside” conversations with family members to the exclusion** of others
 - **easy for family to have more influence over leaders in the church, than other members**
 - **easy for a controlling number of brethren to practically make a decision** through consensus, at a family get together
 - **elders work very hard in their personal lives for this not to happen** to with their families

- **young folks can easily find themselves in cliques**
 - **easy to get in habit of hanging out with young folks you have more in common with**, and not with everyone
 - **church is not like school or recreation**, we have an obligation to greet all the brethren, just not friends

- **when there are cliques in a congregation, the people aren’t treating one another as they should**
 - could quickly develop into sin

- **suggestion:**
 - **set a goal to greet every person at least once a week (Rom. 16:16)**
 - **make the assembly time to be with your “spiritual family”, and have other time for “physical family”**
 - **i.e., talk to each person every week**, move about the congregation, not get in rut of just talking with some

preserve unity: walk worthy of calling, everyone working together, everyone treating each other right
destroys unity: sin, false teaching, pushing personal beliefs, cliques

Summary / Inv.

- **the Lord established a unified church**

- **our job is to preserve the unity by:**

- **walking in a manner worthy of our calling**
- **working together**
- **treating the other members properly**
- **not doing anything that would destroy unity**

- **inv.:**

- **the church is the family of God** (household)
- **just like an earthly family, we must work** to do our part as God's family – **blessings now and eternity**
- **inv.**