

Unity Of The Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-6

1 I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Returning our thoughts to God's message of last week . . . you and I must, with passionate commitment, always keep "love" at the forefront of all that we are, all that we think, and all that we do. Why, because "love" is the first precept of who God is. And likewise, love is the first precept of all that He desires from you and me.

Those words again as they were very plainly spoken by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 22.

37 . . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40)

And although this has been said many times before, I must say it again, this love that is spoken about here is not the manner of love that the "world" knows and speaks about. Not at all! This "love" is of a very different kind, and is actually even a very different word altogether.

This word for love, "Agape", while still having most all the other forms of love within its meaning, has one all-important addition to it. It has the "mysterious presence of God's Holy Spirit living and working within it.

And this special "Agape" love towards our neighbors is accentuated even more passionately when later on in John 13 the Lord Jesus declared that we must love each other even as "He has loved us". There, He said . . .

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: . . . just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35)

Love, in all its forms, when shown and given in its proper context, is very, very “good”. Whether love be of the “brotherly affection” kind, or the “familial”, family kind, or the emotional and physical kind, each form of love is a gift from God.

And then, as God’s Holy Spirit covers over these forms of love with His “Agape” presence, love becomes all that He intends it to be, blessing us beyond measure.

I must confess that as I have studied this word “Agape” I find a mystery within its meaning that I may never fully comprehend, leaving me to ponder it over and over again. And though I do not clearly know its meaning, I do know that I want it in me for God, and for my family, and for all people, because this kind of love is the only thing in existence that is able to cover over a multitude of sins and to bind us together in the unity that we so desperately need for daily life.

It is filled to the fullest with patience and kindness and gentleness and tenderness and comfort and peace. It never seeks benefit for self, only the benefit of others, and it never fails.

And best of all, God does not leave the ministry of this love within our own hands, because we are not able to give it. No, He keeps this love firmly within His own hands, through the ministry of His blessed Holy Spirit, as He abides within us.

And these thoughts about love point us back to these truths that are being given to us in today’s text. Try as we might with all our hearts, we can never, through our own strength obey this second part of God’s great commandment, to love others and be bound together with them in unity, whether it be in the family or the whole church. Such efforts far exceed any ability we might have within us.

Speaking from personal experience, my own struggle to love others, especially with the depth that Christ loves them, is similar to the battle that the Apostle Paul spoke about in Romans chapter 7 in his battle against sin, that battle that rages between our flesh and our spirit.

He said there in Romans 7,

15 . . . I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:15)

The battle is real! It was real for Paul and it is real for you and me as we attempt to show forth this love that God has put within us. Our spirit knows what it is to do, because God’s Holy Spirit within us is ministering to our spirit, telling us what to do. But our flesh, “my claim to my right to myself” is ever and always pressing the fight, demanding “what’s in it for me”?

“Self” is so very needful and so very demanding that when the Spirit desires to share something that belongs to “self”, “self” immediately begins to make life miserable within us. It truly is a battle.

So then, this business of “loving our neighbor as ourselves”, and this “loving others as Christ loves them”, and this “unity of the Spirit” that God is speaking about here, is at best, an impossible assignment.

And a forewarning of that “impossibility” is clearly given, though implicitly, within these words of today’s text. I say implicitly because of the way God words it for us. Here, He doesn’t say outright that we will need a lot of patience and kindness and gentleness to carry out this love, but He does clearly say it. Listen, to these words in verses 2 and 3!

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:2-3)

Here, God is clearly giving guidance about how we are to relate with other believers, individually, and in groups, and in churches and other such settings. Because within each group, there are differing personalities, some passive and some very assertive. For myself, having the personality that was born within me, I am most often out-front and assertive. And that does not always set well with some of the other people within the groups.

And here, God is gently warning me, and the others, about how we should conduct ourselves. And note that He words His instruction it the way that it should be worded, using very positive words. Verse 2,

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:2-3)

But please note also that implicit within these words is a command, the one that we started with, that we are to love the others within our group.

Why and how can God command us to do something that is impossible for us to do, to love those “unlovable” people that He has placed in amongst the circumstances of our day? God can command us to do it because He intends to also give us the enabling strength and power and wisdom to carry it out.

The Bible Commentators tell us that the Apostle Paul wrote these words to the Ephesian Christians because they had divisions erupting within their group.

But the bigger concern of God in giving us these words is that He knew that down through the ages, similar problems and divisions would always be taking place in every venue of our life, whether it be within our own homes, with our wives, our children, or with the whole church.

It is simply a “given”. Why? It is because that is what the world, the flesh and the devil does!

The world has the power to capture our imagination and make us desire its ways, its ideas, and its philosophies. And our flesh, that “old self” within us, though dead, still really does always want to resurrect itself and reassert its ownership over us.

And then to add an even greater burden on top of the world and the flesh, the “devil” is an ever-constant predator, traveling to and fro throughout the earth, seeking whom he may devour, his committed purpose being to “steal, to kill and to destroy”. And he is very adept at his trade.

With that being said, what is satan’s real purpose in all his vile and destructive efforts towards those of us who have Christ as our Savior and Lord, and especially to us as a body of believers?

Oswald Chambers gave us this thought. He believed that satan’s real attack is not necessarily directed at you and me personally, but rather it is his earnest desire to defeat “Christ in us”.

And no, he cannot ever defeat Christ, but it seems that he does not know that. He has never given up on his original dream of being “like God”. Those words from Isaiah 14,

12 “How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, son of Dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low! 13 You said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; 14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’
(Isaiah 14:12-14)

This was satan’s vision, his dream for success, but an impossible one. Why is it impossible? First, because there really is only “One God” and there is no other.

But most of all, to be God you must have all the attributes of God, and that means not just having “omnipotent power”, and “omniscient knowledge and wisdom, and “omnipresence”, which satan does not have, but to be God, you must also be inherently “good”.

One so selfish and so self-centered as satan could never be God, because the greed and arrogance and lust for power would destroy not only his kingdom, it would also destroy his very being. He would self-destruct, just as we see him doing now.

But nonetheless, satan still lusts to be God. And he has dedicated every moment of his existence and every resource at his disposal, his hoards of demonic spirits, to the accomplishment of his dream.

And Jesus, being God, and being the “expressed image” and “exact representation” of all that God is, is satan’s incessant focus. And the Spirit of Christ being present within each of us who have received Him, are then the recipient of all of satan’s attacks.

In a foolish way, it actually makes some sense. If satan can defeat you and me, turn us away from Christ and away from His truth, then in some “small way” it satisfies satan that he has defeated Christ.

But again, in actuality, satan cannot defeat Christ and he never will. But is that not the way of all “nev’r-do-well losers”. They try the same foolish things over and over again, hoping to succeed, but the old failures just keep taking place.

But folks, like all fools, satan will never give up. He will ever and always be at work, trying to defeat Christ in us. And because that battle is taking place within our souls and within the whole body of believers, God is calling each of us to have a role in the response.

And that role is just as these words instruct us. He tells us . . .

1 I . . . urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Here, God is clearly telling you and me that we have a defined role that we must dedicate ourselves too. With humility at the foundation of our being and of our efforts, we are to go about our relationships within the Body of Christ with all gentleness and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Again, this kind of giving and loving and gracious behavior is foreign to our natural personalities. We are by nature, selfish and self-seeking. That is why “humility” must always come first. As we read in Philippians 2 . . .

3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more (important) significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

This is the only way that life within any group, whether it be our family or the whole Body of Christ, can be lived as God calls us to live it, in the “unity of the Spirit” and in the “bond of peace”.

There can be no self-centered interests if we ever hope to have “unity of the Spirit” in the “bond of peace”.

“Unity within the Spirit” assumes that each of the other people within the “Body” really does want the very same thing that God wants, and that we want. While yes, they may go about it differently, a person with a humble heart will always desire the best for the others.

And we are told in other scriptures that a “soft answer turneth away wrath”, and that we should restore an errant person in a spirit of gentleness. Those words in Galatians 6 . . .

1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (Galatians 6:1)

I have found that I will often use wrong words, and strong expressions when I should be far more gentle and forgiving in my tone.

This “unity in the Spirit” requires a deep surrender to Christ and an intentional effort to love others.

The Apostle Paul explained it to us in very simple words as he equated the members of the Body of Christ to the members of our human body. He said in 1 Corinthians 12,

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, (1 Corinthians 12:21-22)

Folks, these words are so very important to each of us as we live each day in amongst other believers, many within our own families, but also in amongst the church, our neighbors and our coworkers. And “Unity in the Spirit”, is the only way it can be possible.

Here in these words, God goes on to speak about

one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

Lord willing, we will carry on further with those words next week, but for now, may we close with this exhortation from God that, yes, you and I have an obligation to others, to humbly make every effort to live with each other in a “unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace”, trusting in the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable everything that we do.