

Unbreakable: The Desperate need for Genuine Unity

As we look around our world at the beginning of 2017 it's easy to see that the bloodshed, anger, violence and discontentment is ubiquitous. Many people and politicians—rather than helping the situation—seem to be exacerbating the problems we face. We know that change is needed, but where will this needed change come from? The scriptures teach in many places that genuine change—change that takes place from the inside out—will only come, by God's grace, through the ministry of the church. (Mt. 5:13-16). Jesus is over all things on behalf of his body, the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Pastor and author, Dr. Bryan Chapell has written these helpful words: "Jesus is changing the world for the good of the church by means of the church...The filling of the world with Christ's purpose for and through the church is the corporate hope that we alone possess. No other agency on earth has this promise. God gives no other institution the promise or the power that it will be salt and light in the world. The world will ultimately and eternally yield to the influence of the church, because it is the body of him who is head over all and thus [the church] contains and exerts power on behalf of his own glory."

Christians gather on the Lord's Day to worship God and learn from his word, seeking by grace, to continue to grow in spiritual maturity. We then scatter throughout the week to the places where God has called us, seeking to be salt and light in a world of darkness and decay. It matters that the church is serious about unity, for the sake of the gospel and for our witness to others. There's too much at stake for us to be selfishly fighting among ourselves (1 Corinthians 3:1-3), certainly within each local body. In this article I want to begin to look at biblical unity from Ephesians 4:1-6. We'll see that the Bible never upholds a 'unity at any price' approach. From this text I'll call attention to four aspects that Paul says are important for true unity in the church of Jesus Christ.

First of all, genuine unity is foundational. Any unity worthy of the name must be based on the foundation of the word of God, the Bible. Paul begins, "I therefore a prisoner for the Lord..." Paul, as well as other biblical writers, uses the Greek conjunction translated, 'therefore' to speak of what he's been writing about up to that point in the letter. Before Paul tells us what we must do, he lays a solid basis of biblical truths. It's this foundation that's meant to undergird and inform our actions. Paul has set everything that he wants to say on a solid foundation of God's grace before he gives commands and exhortations for our Christian lives. Briefly, in chapters 1-3 Paul has given foundational teaching, including election (1:4), growing in holiness (1:4), adoption (1:5), redemption (1:7), forgiveness of sins (1:7), the church (1:22ff), salvation by grace through faith alone (2:8-9), and that's just a brief sampling.

Given the fact that this article goes out to a broad and diverse readership, I recognize that area churches will not be unified on every particular point of biblical teaching. But, we can be unified in the foundational belief that Jesus Christ is the only way that our sins can be forgiven and that we can be right with God. We can be unified in the foundational belief that

salvation is all of God's grace and not based on any works of obedience on our part (Ephesians 2:8-9). And we can be unified in our foundational belief that we should share this wonderful truth of Jesus in word and deed (2:10) with those who don't know him.

Along with a unity that is foundational—based on the word of God—Paul goes on to say that our unity must be visible. In other words, our unity can never be merely a matter of agreement on certain doctrinal teachings but it must also be accompanied with visibly changed lives. The importance of the church being unified is crucial to the church and to the world. We'll look further at unity in the next article.

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