

## THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

### The unity of the Spirit

The theme of this passage is obvious. One word occurs eight times... The word 'one' clearly shows that the focus of this passage is on unity.

### Foundations of unity (2, 3)

- Humility = lowly thinking
- Gentleness = not reactionary
- Patience = longsuffering
- Forbearance = putting up with
- Love = unconditional grace

### The bond of peace

The unity of the Spirit is something we already have. Our task is to maintain it. The thing that binds us together is 'the bond of peace.'

- Bond = 'a tying together'
- Peace [*eirene*; *shalom*] = absence of conflict

Note: peace is not a feeling—it is a state or condition

A question: What does a dove symbolise?

Creation? Second Coming? Holy Spirit? Freedom in Christ? Hope? Peace? Could be any one of these. The problem is not that we see things differently. The problem is how we handle our differences.

- With rigidity, pride and bitterness? Or, with humility, gentleness and love?
- In the bitterness of conflict. Or the bond of peace?

### How to deal with issues

Read Matthew 18:15-17. Jesus tells us what to do when there is a problem—

#### 1. Go to the person concerned

Note that the aim is to win the brother, not the argument! If we don't feel able to do this we should let the matter rest. Sometimes raising an issue only aggravates it. Only if we feel intimidated or powerless (eg if it is someone in a position of power who has offended us) may we proceed to the second option

#### 2. Consult one or two witnesses

Jesus here refers to passages such as Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15. These must be reliable and trustworthy people (not people who will agree with us no matter what!) They must be able to tell us what we need to hear, whether we like it or not. This especially applies to complaints against leaders—see 1 Tim 5:19

#### 3. Consult the church

Church = assembly = relevant meeting. Could be a gathering of ministers or the church

council

or youth leadership etc

Until we have followed this procedure no one else should know about the matter!

Exposing our problems to the checks and balances of the wisdom of the church often reveals their true nature

Note: Adams points out that many a divorce might be prevented if we followed this procedure.

### **Powerful results...**

See Matthew 18:18-22

When we do it Jesus' way, there are powerful results.

#### 1. There is divine endorsement of our actions

The problem is bound and the people are liberated (18). This passage is not about deliverance—it is about reconciliation. Note: The use of the future perfect tense (lit. 'will have been bound...') in Greek shows that we are reflecting what has happened in heaven, not vice versa.

#### 2. When we come together in reconciliation, our prayers are answered (19)

It is not just a matter of two people deciding they want something and then asking for it.

#### 3. When we come together in reconciliation, Jesus is there among us (20).

This passage is not just an excuse for a small attendance!

### **Maintaining unity**

Paul's emphasis on unity is very plain.

- When we are in disunity we deny the faith! Even worse—we deny the Lord himself. (4-6).
- We are to be eager to maintain unity. 'Be eager' = make every effort. Division has hampered the Lord's work more than almost anything else. If there are problems, let's deal with them in Jesus' way.

### **Challenge**

God has brought us together through the blood of Jesus (Eph 2:13-21). It is up to us to maintain that unity. We need to make every effort to do so. We need to cultivate peace—this is the bond that ties us together!

### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Read: Ephesians 4:1-6

1. Paul urges us to 'walk worthily' (ESV). What do you think this means?
2. What is our calling? (1). Verse 4 and Romans 1:7; 8:28; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 1 Peter 2:21-23 and similar passages might help you here.
3. Think about the five qualities that Paul lists as being essential for unity (2). How would you describe each of these in your own words? Which of them is most needful in your own life? Why?

4. Paul exhorts us not just to maintain the unity of the Spirit (3) but to be eager to maintain it (ESV) or to make every effort to keep it (NIV). Why do you think he stresses this?
5. Although this passage stresses unity, the Trinity is also indicated. How and where?
6. Read Matthew 18:15-17. What does Jesus say we should do if we feel someone has acted wrongly towards us? How does this relate to the communion service? See Matthew 5:23-26; 1 Corinthians 11:28-32
7. What are the results of being reconciled with a brother/sister? (18-20).
8. Is there a situation in your own life you need to deal with as Jesus said? What should you do about it?

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