

THE POWER OF UNITY

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INTRODUCTION:

Unity is something that you know when it is present and you know when it is absent. I have been in the Lord's ministry for a long time. I know that in meetings where there is unity, that people would feel relaxed and open themselves up as they feel free to be there. However, when a person who has problems with others in the group joins the meeting, the presence of this person can change the whole atmosphere. In such situations, people suddenly stop talking and many would just stare at the person who has just come in. When there is unity, everything runs smoothly and more gets accomplished, but when there is division and a lack of unity, what you have are chaos and confusion.

In the story of the Tower of Babel God had commanded Noah and his sons to disperse and repopulate the earth, but rather than being obedient to God, they decided to settle down and build a city for themselves and, worse, they decided to erect a tower that would reach into the heavens.

Genesis 11:5-6 ⁵But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. ⁶The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.

"Behold, they are one people (New American Standard)

Even though they were disobedient and rebellious against God, these verses demonstrate the power of unity. These verses tell us that we can accomplish much more when we work together rather than we are divided.

So this morning, I want to share with you several thoughts about unity.

1) THE BLESSINGS OF UNITY

A. UNITY ATTRACTS GOD'S FAVOR AND ANOINTING (GETS GOD'S ATTENTION)

There are several blessings or benefits when there is unity among the people.

Psalms 133:1-2

How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,

running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

This passage tells us that unity is like the anointing oil that runs down the beard of Aaron.

Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit.

I believe where there is unity, the presence or the power of the Holy Spirit will be present and operating. It also says that God commands His blessing where there is unity.

Acts 2:1-4

¹When the day of Pentecost came, they were **all together in one place**. ²Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Think about this - the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost when the believers were in one mind and one accord. In the previous passage of people building the Tower of Babel, while they were building it, God came down to see what they were doing.

If we want God to empower us and bless us, there has to be unity in the church. God cannot bless and favour division. God isn't attracted to disunity as He is a God of unity. There is unity in the Godhead and He expects there to be unity among His people.

E.g. There was a story of a pastor who was invited by the pastor of a church in another town. He was going to preach on the topic "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!"

The guest speaker was hosted by the pastor of the church. When he got into the house, the host pastor said welcome, but when he looked around, he noticed the host pastor's wife was angry about something, and then the drama unfolded. An argument broke out between the host pastor and his wife. The guest speaker felt so uncomfortable that he could not stay in the house and went out. He subsequently changed his sermon title for the next day to 'A house divided cannot stand'.

How would you feel if you went to a house like that?

The Holy Spirit is not comfortable in that kind of environment. So, we need to make our homes and our church places where He feels comfortable in, places where He is welcome.

Jesus prayed that His people would experience unity.

John 17:21 (NLT)

²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.

We know that God commands His blessing where there is unity. God will place His favour on a church when there is unity. He will open doors and opportunities for a church that walks in unity.

B. UNITY LEADS TO GREATER PRODUCTIVITY**Ecclesiastes 4:9 KJV**

⁹ Two *are* better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

More can be accomplished when we work together than working separately.

When Jesus sent out the disciples, He sent them out two by two. In those days when they went out for street evangelism, one would share the gospel while the other prayed. For instance, when I go for house visits, I really want Angie to go with me. We can support each other in our conversation and there are more things to talk about.

C. UNITY LEADS TO SUSTAINABILITY

A house divided cannot stand, it cannot last.

The same is true for a church.

If a church is divided it will not accomplish what it's supposed to accomplish. It will not be everything that God wants it to be. A church that is divided will eventually break down from within. It will destroy itself. If we are to last and be sustainable, there must be unity. And if you are thinking - Jesus said He would build His church and the gates of hell would not prevail against it, you would be correct – the Lord did say that. But it is His church that He's building. If a church chooses to divide and be disunited, it will be overcome by Satan. The Lord's church is meant to have unity, not division. His church is meant to have order, not chaos and confusion.

2) HINDRANCES TO UNITY**A. UNFORGIVENESS**

The unwillingness to forgive someone who has wronged you hinders unity.

And many times those that have wronged you may not even realize that they had hurt you in one way or another.

B. BITTERNESS

Unforgiveness turns into bitterness and resentment.

When we fail to forgive others, we hold on to our hurts, and we hold grudges against those who have hurt us, and perhaps we might even show anger towards them.

Unforgiveness among fellow believers is unfortunately rather common. There have been reports of Christians who will not talk to each other in church, who will not even look at each other, and who even refuse to sit on the same side of the auditorium. There are also pastors who will not forgive church members – even though these pastors preach about forgiveness, and believers who will not forgive their pastor. It's easy to see why there are so many prayerless and powerless churches!

Ephesians 4:31-32

³¹ Get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Don't have anything to do with any kind of hatred. ³² Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive one another, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.

(Also, in Colossians 3:13-14).

It says get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. This is a choice, an action!

C. JEALOUSY

1 Corinthians 3:1-4

¹ Brothers and sisters, I couldn't speak to you as people who live by the Holy Spirit. I had to speak to you as people who were still following the ways of the world. You aren't growing as Christ wants you to. You are still like babies. ² The words I spoke to you were like milk, not like solid food. You weren't ready for solid food yet. And you still aren't ready for it. ³ You are still following the ways of the world. Some of you are jealous. Some of you argue. So aren't you following the ways of the world? Aren't you acting like ordinary human beings? ⁴ One of you says, "I follow Paul." Another says, "I follow Apollos." Aren't you acting like ordinary human beings?

When we are jealous of others and what God does in their lives, and how God uses them, it can create division rather encourage unity.

We have seen people in church who are full of jealousy, envy, and strife, and this has divided the people in the church. When we covet other people's gifts rather than celebrate the giftings that God has given them, there will always be division. But let me say this, instead of being envious of someone else's gift, discover your own gift and then use your gift.

In the passage that we have just read, some were saying they were with Paul, others were saying they were with Apollos. God has a purpose for everyone in the church, and everyone is needed in the church.

D. SELF-FOCUS/SELF-ABSORPTION

When you believe in Jesus you become part of God's family, therefore you have to lose the "me" mentality. It is no longer just about you. If we choose to focus only on ourselves, there will be a lack of unity.

When the focus is on "me, myself, and I" unity will be missing in the church.

Paul says, in **Philippians 2:3-4**

³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Don't just look out for your own interests but look out for the interests of others as well.

Consider others as more important than yourself.

Think about this, if everyone took care of the needs of someone else, everyone's needs would be met.

But if we come to church thinking, "what can the church do for me", no one gets helped and the unity of the church will never be developed.

3) KEYS TO RESTORING UNITY

A. PRAYING FOR ONE ANOTHER

Matthew 5:44-45

⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

We are to pray for our enemies because this is how our God treats them. So, if we do what He does it proves that we are His children. But more than a proof, when we do what the Father does the same Spirit in the Father that love and treat His enemy well will be on us.

B. LETTING GO OF THE PAST

Colossians 3:13

¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

This may be one of the hardest things to do but letting go of what is behind us will go a long way towards helping us to build unity. Forgiving the hurtful things that someone did to you is letting go the past.

Too many people cannot move forward as they are stuck in the past. Whether it is reliving the good times of the past or reopening the wounds of the past, the past keeps a lot of people and a lot of churches stuck. But the past is over, we cannot change it, we cannot relive it. We can learn from it, but we must not allow it hold us hostage. We must not let it divide us. We have to let go of the past so that we can move forward.

C. LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Colossians 3:14

¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

True love for one another will lead to real unity and it takes the Holy Spirit to bring real love.

Love is a work of the Holy Spirit. It is a fruit of the Spirit.

We may not always love perfectly but love should flow from our lives naturally as believers and if we find that we are not that loving, then maybe we need to examine our hearts and our lives to see where we are in our relationship with God.

D. BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS

Galatians 6:2

² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.

The church should be a place where we lift one another up and help each other through life. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep.

We are not in this Christian life alone. No one here today should feel like he or she has to face what he or she is going through by himself or herself. The family of God should be a support system for each other.

We should encourage one another, and we should be able to share what is going on in our lives without fear of being judged. Our brothers and sisters in Christ should be able to count on us.

CONCLUSION:

Several centuries ago, ancient China wanted to secure its borders from its northern invaders.

So, they built the Great Wall of China to protect the border. The massive wall stretched for 5,000km during the Qin dynasty, when the wall was originally built. It was 4m to 9.7m thick and 7.5m to 14m high.

The wall was too high for the enemy to scale, too thick to tear down, and too long to go around. They also posted soldiers at different places.

It was built wide enough on the top for chariots to patrol. If they heard of an attack at a distant location, they could easily get to it. They were up high giving them a superior advantage over their enemies. They knew that they had protected their borders sufficiently against all enemies.

Nonetheless in the first 100 years of the Great Wall of China, the nation was invaded three times.

How? An enemy bribed the gatekeepers and entered into the land undetected.

When we diminish the importance of unity in the body of Christ, we risk being invaded by the enemy.

If we do not protect, strive for, and do everything we can to promote unity in the church, we open the gate to the enemy. The enemy will attack and cause ineffectiveness and destruction.

Everyone has a part to play in promoting and protecting the unity of the church.

It takes the effort of everyone.

So, today it is my prayer and desire that God would make us one.

It is my prayer that any issues we may have with one another would be dealt with and laid aside that we might go forward and do all that God has called us to do.