

Hope beyond Divisions

Scripture Reading: John 13:10-17

Intro:

Before Andrew Jackson became the 7th president of the United States, he served as a major general in the Tennessee militia.

During the War of 1812 his troops reached an all-time low morale. As a result they began arguing, bickering, and fighting among themselves.

It is reported that General Jackson, known as Old Hickory called them together on one occasion when tensions were at their worst and said, "Gentlemen! Let's remember, the enemy is over there!"

When we think about this it is a sober reminder to the church today.

In fact I wonder if Christ sometimes looks down at His Church and says with a sigh, "Christians, your Enemy is over there! Stop your infighting! Pull for one another. Support one another. Believe in one another. Care for one another. Pray for one another. Love one another."

It was Aristides who made a very profound statement when he came back from spying mission

on the "Christians," and he reported to Emperor Hadrian a mixed report.

But the words he spoke have been recorded and echoed down through history, "***Behold! How they love one another.***"

How often do we hear such words today from those who don't know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior but they have watched those of us who do?

I really do think that it's much more likely that we hear them say,
"Behold, how they hurt one another!
Behold, how they judge one another!
Behold! How they fight with one another."

As I study the Word of God, I find from the early beginning of the organized church to today's church we hear what Charles Swindoll says, "**This is the generation that has given new meaning to the shameful practice of brother-bashing and sister-smashing. You would think we were enemies rather than members of the same family. Something is wrong with this picture.**"

Jesus explained and exhorted us believers that we were to be in the spirit of unity and genuine love for others, but the problem today in His church, rarely demonstrates those qualities.

You question that? All you have to do is walk into a Christian bookstore and look at the books that

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reflect love and unity within the body of Christ. Or do these books reflect polarization, criticism, and judgment of one another?

There is more energy exuded by believers in the Church today for personal and selfish gain than love and unity among the brothers and sisters.

I feel I can judge this for I've been pastoring for 38 years. And all you have to do is talk to other pastors and church in our land today.

This brings me to my first point on the outline:

I. Unity: An Almost Forgotten Virtue

I want us to look and underscore this important quality that Jesus stressed to His disciples for the last time.

They had met together for a meal on the second floor room in the city of Jerusalem.

Jesus notices that the disciples had come into the room with dirty feet – which wasn't really surprising in that country.

So during the supper time Jesus arose from the table and poured some water into a basin and proceeded to go around the table and wash the disciples' feet.

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What a sight that must have been! To see the Savior stooping to wash the dirty feet of the disciples.

It says in verse 12, ***“And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you?”***

Now we have to understand that Jesus wasn't looking for the obvious answer to what He had just done, “You've washed our feet, Master.”

Instead He was looking for the answer He is going to explain to them a few moments later.

Look at vv. 12-17 The Message

12-17 ***Then he said, "Do you understand what I have done to you? You address me as 'Teacher' and 'Master,' and rightly so. That is what I am. So if I, the Master and Teacher, washed your feet, you must now wash each other's feet. I've laid down a pattern for you. What I've done, you do. I'm only pointing out the obvious. A servant is not ranked above his master; an employee doesn't give orders to the employer. If you understand what I'm telling you, act like it—and live a blessed life.***

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Don't you believe that most every one of the disciples would have returned the favor and washed their Master's feet?

After all they expressed their love to Him.

But this is not what Jesus wanted from them.

He wanted them to ***“Wash one another's feet.”***

Then a little bit later Jesus changes the subject from washing one another's feet to loving one another.

In John 13:34-35 it reads, ***“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

It's easy to love Jesus for what He has done for us.

It another story for us to love other Christians at times for what they have done to us.

Yet this is the command Jesus gives to us.

When we love one another as it says ***“Behold! How they love one another.”*** It's this kind of love that attracts those who are unsaved.

It really doesn't mean so much when we talk to the lost about their lost condition as it means

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everything with how we treat one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

If we want to make an impact on our community and those who are unsaved, then we have to listen to what Jesus says, ***“Love one another.”***

Jesus said, ***“That's how they'll know that you're different. Your love will speak with stunning eloquence to a lost world.”***

Then in the last hour before His arrest and trial, Jesus prayed to the Father on behalf of His disciples.

20 “I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. 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.

22 “I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. 23 I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. NLT

Now – isn't that amazing?

Jesus was praying for us during those final hours of His life.

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Jesus was praying that you and I might make an impact on the world because of our love and unity for each other.

The margin notes of the New American Standard gives us this literal translation: ***“That they may be perfected into one unit.”***

A unit is a team, folks.

No more brother-bashing – No more sister-mashing.

No more ugly gossip groups.

No more sarcastic, judgmental putdowns of others.

Jesus’ prayer was that we would experience such a change in our lives that we would have unity, oneness. We don’t have to look alike. We don’t even have to think alike. We can even disagree.

But we must be a Unit; our eyes on the same goal, our hearts in the same place, our commitment at the same level.

And we must love one another.

If there is anything that would keep me away from the church today if I was unsaved it would be the attitude Christians have towards one another.

That would do it.

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For the life of me I don’t understand how some believers are always seeking for themselves – what they desire – selfishness, conceit and pride are the things that break down our fellowship and erode our unity.

Paul said in Phil. 2:3-4 ***“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”***

If you are a believer in this church or any other church and you are wondering what is going wrong, what’s missing, what’s happened to the unity you once had, I’ll guarantee somebody isn’t abiding by these verses.

Do you want to pull together as the family of God?

It’s a matter of obeying Philippians 2:3-4.

Stop looking for the credit.

Stop thinking you are important.

Stop looking for what you can get out of it.

Think about the other person instead of yourself.

Don’t be selfish.

Sounds a little like something a teacher would say to her roomful of elementary children, doesn’t it?

Yet, how many adult problems could be solved if the elementary truths woven into these two verses were the driving force in our relationship with each other?

How many committees could resolve disputes?

How many couples could reconcile their marital differences?

II. Love: A Never-to-be-forgotten Command

What is the teaching of Christ here in John chapter 13?

Remember Jesus and Paul were writing to people who were hurting people.

They were scattered.

They were distressed and discouraged by various trials and conflicts.

It was a dangerous time to be a Christian. It was during the reign of Nero when Christians were killed for testifying about Jesus.

There were some who were tempted to doubt, some tempted to conform to their society, some tempted compromise, or even some tempted to give up altogether.

Application:

I recall my Dad and Mom telling us kids when we were growing up that we might fight and they discouraged that, we would have our differences, but our parents always told us that we were family. If your brother or your sister needs you, you take care of them. You love them. You pull for them.”

When people hurt in the church – and we’ve all been there – it’s easy to get a little thin on love.

But that’s what people need the most – they need our love. They need to sense we are pulling for them – not against them.

They need our support in prayer and encouragement.

They need a Church family where they felt accepted and they feel unity.

Now I want to take us to I Peter 1:22-23

22 You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth, so now you must show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters. Love each other deeply with all your heart.

23 For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.

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There are three things Peter stresses here for us to be encouraged:

- 1) Obedience to the truth
- 2) Purity of the soul
- 3) A lack of hypocrisy

Being Obedient to the truth simply means that we see people not through our biases, but we see them through the eyes of God and love them as God loves them.

What does this do for us?

It has a purifying effect on us.

It purges us from being prejudiced, resentful, hurt feelings, and grudges.

We love each other without hypocrisy and instead with a true Christian love.

It doesn't blind us to each other's faults; it just gives us the grace to overlook them.

Folks, the glue that holds all this together is LOVE.

The Apostle Peter tells us ***"Love one another from the heart."***

Peter uses the thought here that is difficult to pick up in the English language.

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There are two Greek words used predominantly in the New Testament to describe love, and Peter uses both of them here.

- 1) One is Philos, which refers to brotherly love or the love of a friend.

This is ***"Love for the brothers and sisters."***

- 2) The other Love is Agape, a higher form of love, it's described more like a Divine Love.

This is the Word Peter uses in this case when he speaks of ***"Loving one another."***

There's plenty of the Philos love in our churches today, but there is a real lack of the Agape Love, The Divine Love that Jesus commanded us to have for one another.

Let me ask you – Would you stop and look inside your heart?

Are you fervently loving one another from your heart?

You see – when we are snippy with one another
When we are negative
When we are judgmental
When we are ugly toward a brother or Sister

I look at my heart and attitude and have to admit when the Holy Spirit shines His convicting light upon me He exposes my carnal attitude and I find that my heart is not right.

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It's that old negro spiritual that says, "It's not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer. It's not the preacher nor the deacon but it's me, O Lord, Standing in the need of prayer."

III. Support: Four much needed Reminders What kind of love and support do we need?

What kind of love and support do we give?

What about starting some "Love one another" support group in our church?

Could you go to someone and put your arm around their shoulder and say to them, "I'm in your corner. I'm praying for you. If you need anything I'm here for you."

I was going through a difficult situation not too long ago and I had a very strong pastor say to me, "Dan, you're my hero. I believe in you. I support you."

Do you know what that did for me?

Some are struggling with marital problems and divorce and they are desperately trying to get their lives together.

How do we as a Church work together to help them?

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Could there be someone or a small group of people who would band together and begin to give them the love, courage and lack of judgment that they need?

What is it about the family of God that gives us this sense of oneness and support?

Since we don't look alike and we don't all have the same temperament and we don't all vote the same way at election time, what is it that draws believers together?

1) We are Children of the Same Father.

I Peter 1:23 ***"For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding Word of God."***

We are all adopted.

We all have the Same Father.

We all come to Him the same way – through His Son Jesus Christ.

We are all members of the same family.

We've all been born anew.

We're all brothers and sisters in the Lord.

2) We take our instructions from the same One.

We all have the Same Word of God.

The Seed is the Word of God

But for the seed to grow and produce fruit in our lives, it has to be embraced and applied.

We may all hear the same sermon on Sunday morning, but unless our ears are listening and our hearts prepared, that seed will be picked up by Satan's beak and winged right out of our lives.

You can sit and listen to the truth being delivered, and it can change your life in a moment's time.

Yet someone sitting right next to you, hearing the same message, can go right on living against the will of God.

You see – we have a responsibility to not only hear the truth, but to apply it.

Just being exposed to the truth will not change us.

3) We all have the same struggles.

But we have to have Unity for us to have an impact on our community for Jesus.

LET ME BE EVEN MORE PRACTICAL.

There are seven key questions all of us need to ask whenever there is something that bothers us:

- 1) Is this an issue with eternal importance?
- 2) Have I brought this to God in prayer?
- 3) Is God trying to teach Me something?
- 4) Is it possible that the problem resides in me?
Is this an ego problem? Am I making my preference the standard for everyone else?
- 5) Is this an issue I should simply overlook?
- 6) Is this worth risking hurt feelings and a possible church split?
- 7) Would Jesus spend His time on this?

Learning to show respect and love to each other even when we disagree is, I believe, the key to Christian love, unity and maturity.

Let me use just one example: Worship music versus hymns. Please listen patiently to what I have to say.

There seems to be more conflict about music than anything else in the church today.

The style of music used in worship is certainly a secondary issue.

When one kind of music is considered worshipful and another is not we are guilty of making our personal preference the standard of truth.

I think it is a sign of unity in a church to be able to recognize that some people love hymns and others love more contemporary choruses.

It seems to me that we Believers should be able to love, have unity and sing both kinds of music.

Can you imagine in John and Charles Wesley's day and the reaction of the high church when they took Bar Room tunes and put Christian words to the songs that we now call hymns?

Let me draw some needed Conclusions:

Jesus, the Apostle Paul and Peter spent a good portion of time about divisions in the church.

Paul knew that squabbles in a church diminishes the testimony of a church in their community.

Grumbling among believers makes it very difficult for those outside the church to believe the message of God's incredible love.

Jesus and Paul both did not want anything to cast a negative shadow over the magnificent message of the Gospel.

Satan happily will do everything he can to encourage conflict and division in a church.

He will attempt to get us to feel that these disagreements over tastes and preferences are really "essential matters."

They are not!

Satan loves to destroy churches and their testimonies from the inside out.

Church family we must once and for all resist his temptation

We can learn about love and we can talk about love but it will mean nothing until we all practice it.

If you take a science class you often have the classroom lecture and the lab work.

The lab is where you test or experience what you have been taught.

It is where you really learn.

I believe our Christian faith is like that.

We have a classroom where we study the Bible.

Our lab time comes when we live out these commands the things that Jesus taught us to do.

True Christian love starts by making room for the personal preferences of others.

If we really understand God's love, we will celebrate what we hold in common in Christ while we continue to leave room for differences, understanding, and our passion – the things that are most important to us.

Let me get painfully personal with you and me as we apply the Word of God today:

1. Are you nursing an old hurt? If so, it's time for you to let that go. It's time to forgive. We are told to forgive each other as Christ Jesus forgave us. So let it go. You need to ask Jesus to help you get over it. Move on.
2. Are you a person who likes to "stir up the pot?" Do you seem to get energized by a conflict? Then you need to confess this before God and ask Him to help you to develop a passion for unity rather than division.
3. Have you concluded that you have the things of God figured out and anyone who disagrees with you is obviously wrong? If so, you need to confess your pride and carnal nature to God. You need to consider the possibility that you may be the one who is wrong.

4. Do you feel like you have to correct any misstatement another person makes? Do you see yourself as the "policeman of truth?" If so, you need to get over yourself. Learn to cut people some slack.
5. Do you relish the news that another church is having trouble? Confess your hardness of heart and learn to weep over any conflict in a church, knowing that such conflict hurts all those in the body of Christ.
6. Do you get together with those who seem to always complain and criticize about what is going on – or what is not going on? If so, you need to put a stop to the grumbling or find yourself another group that won't lead you into sin.
7. Do you sit in worship and get angry because of some issue going on? If so, then it would be better for you to worship some where else where you can worship and not poison the worship of those around you. There are times we may need to quietly leave a church. We may need something different in our life?

God has made Unity, Love and Support for one another a very High Priority Issue.

If we go against God and His priority – we stand the danger of sinning against Him and the Body of Christ.

Remember “The enemy is over there.”

Behold! How we need to love one another.

Invitation: