

A UNITED CHURCH IN A DIVIDED CULTURE

1

WHEN THE WORLD IS AT ITS WORST, THE CHURCH SHOULD BE AT ITS BEST.

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"A unified church in a divided culture"
"Endeavoring (making every effort) to keep (preserve) the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Eph. 4:3
"And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:14

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True unity will only be a reality when we LOVE diversity.
Unity is not sameness and therefore can only be manifested in the presence of diversity.

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I. PRIORITY:
"Unity, within the church body, is very important to the heart of our Lord. Nowhere are we told to "make unity" but we obviously are instructed to "keep the unity". The reason for this is that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to bring unity. This, He does, centered around truth. Thus, when the body and bride of Christ are focused on the truth of the person and work of Christ and the finality of the Word of God, He brings unity....a unity of all members of the Body of Christ which then, we as individuals, are to work at protecting and preserving. In fact, it is interesting to note that the harshest of terms is used in the Word of God to describe those who purposefully are not actively involved in this endeavor."

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*Consider the seriousness of the alternative...
Proverbs 6:16-19 ("Abomination")*
We must be actively involved in this which is so important to the heart of our Lord...not "unbiblical compromise" but "Christ-like" unity...not a "destruction" of the Body...but...a "preservation" of the Body. Not "my way or the highway" but God's way, God's will, God's glory...in fact, a God focus on the two things which the Holy Spirit brings unity around...

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* Person and Work of Christ

* Finality of the Word of God

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II. PROGRAM:

"Grace" - the radical life transforming view (and it is) of intimacy of life and relationship with our Heavenly Father.

** Saving Grace - that dramatic statement which on the one hand pronounces the human condition as helpless and incapable - becomes a triumphant proclamation that God in Christ has acted in coming to the aid of all those who in believing faith embrace the person and work of Christ for salvation -*

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** Strengthening Grace - that reassuring lesson which instructs us concerning our God's attitude of acceptance and love toward us - as the writer of Hebrews testifies - at the moments of our greatest need - as we approach His throne clothed in the righteousness of Christ - we find the God of the universe welcoming us and strengthening us -*

** Serving Grace - that sanctifying process of being shaped into the image of Christ - as He prepares us and sustains us in the glorious "privilege" of serving Him - we who have been recipients of that grace - of necessity - must be dispensers of that grace -*

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** Self-less Grace - A lifestyle not focused on self - but a grace that at times seeks common ground for the greater good - a grace that sets self aside in order to keep the focus on the Savior -*

III. PROPOSITIONS:

I Believe That:

"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:13-17)

"Peacemakers are promised a special blessing from the Lord" (Matt. 5:9)

"We have been entrusted with ministry that is to be marked by 'the spirit of reconciliation' " (II Cor. 5:19-20)

"I have the right to do anything," you say - but not everything is beneficial. I have the right to do anything" - but not everything is constructive." (I Cor. 1:23)

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I WILL BE:

"In any process of mediation, the process begins with myself" (Ps. 139:23-24)

"Passionate in my pursuit of this peace"

"Fervent in prayer"

"Careful in my walk of fellowship with the Lord"

"Obedient to hearing and doing the Word of God"

"Guarded in my speech"

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IV. PRINCIPLES:

A. Defined:

1. Conflict: A belief (not necessarily a fact) that if you get what you want, I won't get what I want.

2. Confrontation: Facing and resolving conflict rather than fleeing from it.

3. Convictions: (Biblical) - those "timeless truths" which are "anchored" in the "changeless doctrine" of the "eternally settled" word of almighty God. Essential objective facts. Essential to our salvation and our Christian faith.

(God give me strength)

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4. Convictions: (personal) - : beliefs gained through interpretation. Not essential to salvation ~ true believers may differ.
(God give me patience)

5. Changeable: those "traditions" that change from Christian generation to Christian generation and / or from Christian church culture to Christian church culture. How God has led me to live my life in the gray areas. These are subjective and situational.
(God give me grace)

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6. Choices: Personal preferences of fellow believers. These opinions that change regularly and are as varied in subject and content as the church is diverse. Likes and dislikes in daily choices. (God give me humility)
Warning: In resolving conflict over changeable/choices, we need to be very careful that our actions or words do not violate clear Convictions...if they do...SIN!

7. Consistency: Be very careful which label you choose (offensive / preference / sin) because that label must then be upheld without discrimination.

"Sin" - violation of God's word and will
"Offense" - enticement to sin - of another Believer
"Preference" - personal choice - another Believer's unease

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Warning: Be careful what you "tag righteousness on" because then you're stuck!

8. Cautious: Be balanced! The greatest need in the church today is "grace and truth" (John 1:14)
Two Extremes to avoid
- No convictions at all. No absolutes. Leads to license, excuses to sin, rejecting accountability.
- Convictions about everything. No gray areas. Must know everything (must be God). Leads to legalism and a blanket for living by fear and against living by faith.

9. Counsel: A great help in "self-counsel". Am I being motivated by "Fear" - (traditionalist - hold on to "my" past) - or by "Faith" - a Biblicist confident that God is God and I'm not, so I rest in His attributes.

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B. Demonstrated:
* Acts 15

1. Disagreements will occur in an atmosphere of spiritual advancement !

2. Disagreements will occur over convictions and preferences !

* Determine which it is and look to the word -
* Unity can only be known in diversity!
* Respond don't React (Gal.5)
* Discern the personality and focus of the person involved - Paul - Get it right - Get it done - Barnabas - Get along - Give appreciation
* Guard your heart - ask questions but don't question !

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3. Disagreements do not split apart relationships!

4. Disagreements "unchecked" grow into contentions !
Three ways to "uncheck":
* Ignore the disagreement
* Fail to communicate through an issue with appreciation for the perspective and personality of the other person.
* v. 37a Set the will

5. Contentions not disagreements destroy relationships!

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Desires of our heart....
- become Demanding Desires
- which become Damning Desires
- which have become Distorted Desires
- because...deceived by good desires they have become idolatrous desires
(This progression)....* Alfred Poirier "The Peacemaking Pastor"
* James 4
* III./Israel - Numbers 11

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6. The Disagreements of others must not become ours.
 7. The Cause of Christ is bigger than any disagreement (vv. 39-41)

** Practical Helps: ~ Personal Life*
 1. In areas of biblical convictions, don't subtract from or add to God's clear, eternally settled, revealed truth (Deuteronomy 4:1-2, Revelation 18-19).
 2. Make sure your personal convictions are formed from a literal, historical, contextual, grammatically correct interpretation of the Biblical text. The point is not what we think the text says. The point is what the text does say in its original contextual meaning.
 3. Keep changeables that are not specifically spelled out in scripture to a minimum. (Colossians 2:16-23)

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4. Give up your "rights" to certain changeables/choices for the sake of other believers (1 Corinthians 8:4-13). Our freedom in Christ must be used to glorify God and for the good of the Body (1 Cor. 10:23-33) (Rom. 14:1-23).

5. God uses those men and women who purpose to live "by grace" in holding to their biblical and personal convictions. It is good to live a committed, sacrificial life in our choices/changeables rather than compromise in a godless world (1 Corinthians 10:31) - but live all of these with grace!

** Practical Helps: ~ Professional Leadership*
 Authoritarian Leadership - glorifies man
 Strong/servant Leadership - glorifies Christ

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Conclusion/Summary:

1. Define the Category
2. Discern the Perspective of the person
3. Desire a wise Compromise
4. Describe all Possibilities
5. Determine to Act Right
6. Derail the Flesh's Tendency to be Uncivil
7. Develop the Proper Attitude
8. Devote yourself to embracing the Character of Christ

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BY:

- Responding biblically
- "Grace & truth"
- Swift to hear, slow to speak
- Don't set the will
- Refuse to "pout"
- Philippians 2

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* "In Essentials, Unity ~ In Non-Essentials, Liberty ~ In All Things, Charity."
 - Rupertus Meldenius - 1627

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- ❖ "We can't preach a united gospel as a divided church."
- ❖ "Unity is not a 'nice to have'. Unity is mission critical."
- ❖ "Would you be willing to pray for what Jesus prayed for? (John 17) Would you add the following to your prayer routine: 'Heavenly Father, make us one and begin with me.' Christians will disagree. But it's possible to disagree without it disrupting our *unity*."

*Jesus thought so.
 He prayed so.
 Let's do so.*

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