

When I was a young boy my father often said to me, *“Anything worth doing is worth doing well.”* His father had said it to him, and he thought he should pass it on to me.

But I did not pass it along to my son. Somewhere along the way I realized that advice didn’t work in the real world. Most often you don’t have time or the resources to do everything well. Some things don’t merit your best efforts.

I began to figure it out in school. Some teachers didn’t give us enough time on major tests to answer all the essay questions to the very best of our ability. Each test question had a numerical value attached. Some questions were worth only 5 points out of 100. Others were worth 20 or 30 points. Once, I ran out of time. I focused on the first question, which was worth only 5 points. I did it well; my answer was superb. I was sure the teacher would extol it as a scholastic masterpiece. But that didn’t leave me enough time to do justice to the 30-point questions that deserved my best effort. I had majored in the minors. I didn’t score well on the test.

I learned by experience that not everything is worth doing well.

Someone said, *‘There is little education in the second kick of a mule.’* Some lessons you must learn the first time. This isn’t rocket science! You know that to take proper care of your body, regular exercise is more important than a regular pedicure.

- Okay; so let’s apply this to a church. You can find out how healthy a church is by the answer to this question: does it major in the majors or major in the minors?

Does it focus on its biblically-mandated purpose as a living church, or does it just behave like a secular organization with a religious badge on it?

The Purpose of Crossroads Church is to prayerfully introduce people to Jesus, grow them to be like Jesus, care for others, minister to others, and to glorify God.

Crossroads has committed itself to doing this well. That’s what we’re here for.

If we’re going to do what we’re supposed to do well, we have to be who Christ expects us to be as his church.

There is a myriad of other things we do as a church. They’re important, but they’re not absolutely essential. It may be nice to get a good cup of coffee when you come for the weekend services, but the effectiveness of our church doesn’t depend on you having your cup of “jo.”

- How do think church unity lines up in importance, as compared to, let’s say, an attractive church building? How many of us should get involved in maintaining unity, and how much time and effort should we put into it? What does the Bible tell us? According to the Apostle Paul, we must make every effort to maintain unity in the church.

- Let me read an example for you: Ephesians 4:1-6.

<sup>1</sup> *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

<sup>2</sup> *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

<sup>3</sup> *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--*  
<sup>5</sup> *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*

<sup>6</sup> *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Here’s something we should know about the apostle Paul’s letters in the New Testament and the accounts of his life and work in the Book of Acts: when Paul deals with spiritually lost people he gives his best attention to the gospel of Christ, and when he deals with churches he focuses on Christian unity.

In Ephesians 4:1-6 we find two reasons why unity is worthy of your best effort for the sake of the church.

## **I. UNITY IS AN ESSENTIAL QUALITY OF A CHURCH Ephesians 4:1-3**

A church without unity is dead. It’s impossible to have life without unity because the members of the church are spiritually connected to each other. Without unity a church is about as healthy as a dismembered cadaver.

Let’s not confuse union with unity. One is external and may be artificial, the other is internal and it is genuine.

Years ago when I was in College I heard an old Scottish preacher explain the difference between union and unity.

He said, *‘If you take two big ginger tomcats, tie their tails together and hang them over a clothesline, you will have union, but you won’t have unity.’*

To have a healthy church we have to relate to one another the way God intended it.

<sup>1</sup> *As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.*

Paul lived a life worthy of his calling as a follower of Jesus Christ, and it landed him in a heap of trouble.

He was locked up in the slammer for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I'd say that Paul had earned the right to urge Christ's followers to be real—to live up to what they professed.

This word “worthy” in verse one is the Greek word *axios*. For many of his readers that word would have created a mental picture—a picture of measuring scales. The amount being measured should be in balance with the weights on the other side.

Paul used this word picture to make this point: the person you profess to be should be authenticated by the way you live. The two should measure up. Make sure that your lip and your life coincide!

- He tells us what this looks like:

<sup>2</sup>*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

There's no way on God's earth that unity can happen without humility.

Pride is one of the chief causes of disunity and division. People are too proud to admit that they are wrong or to say they're sorry.

- The church in Ephesus was slap in the middle of the Greek world. The word for humility here, *tapeinophrosuné*, was not a positive term for Greeks. They didn't like it. Greeks didn't consider humility a virtue.

Jesus Christ turned humility into a strength and a virtue.

Jesus humbled himself when he set aside his heavenly glory with all his divine prerogatives and came down to mankind in all the filth of our sins. Without guarding his reputation he bore the guilt and the penalty for our sins. That stands as the ultimate in humility!

- The apostle Paul urged the Christians in Philippi, another Greek-culture city, to have this attitude of humility. It's an attitude that promotes unity and makes the gospel of Jesus Christ believable to watching people.

He also warned the Christians in Rome, *'Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment . . .'* (Romans 12:3)

- Another ingredient of unity in verse 2 is gentleness or meekness. It's the opposite of a defiant arrogance.

Arnold T. Olson said, *'Meekness is not weakness, but strength that has been tenderized.'*

If people insist on having their own way and withdraw their support or involvement when something is not to their liking, they disrupt unity.

A person who is meek does not assert his own importance or authority for his own advantage.

- Then there's patience, also called “longsuffering.” It's a personal quality that is evident in a refusal to retaliate.

It's the same word used by the apostle Peter to explain the apparent delay in Christ's coming. He says it is really God's patience, “not wishing any to perish, but all to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:15)

- And there's one more quality that is essential to unity— forbearance, or bearing with one another in love.

It means making allowances for one another's weaknesses and failings.

It's impossible to have unity in a church if we're intolerant of other people's weaknesses and make excuses for our own.

Because of love for each other as people who have received God's forgiveness, we bear with one another and we don't make a major crisis out of a minor quirk.

- If there is no evidence of unity in a church you know that something is very wrong with the church. Either it's a sick church, or it's a dead church. The Spirit of God has gone from it.

If the Holy Spirit is active in the life of a church there will be an obvious unity.

Abraham Lincoln observed: *'No matter how much cats fight, there always seem to be plenty of kittens.'*

That may be true among felines, but it's the kiss of death in the church family—the family of God.

If Christians are always hissing and scratching and causing fur to fly, you can be certain there won't be plenty of new Christians around.

- How should we view a church that is being ripped apart by dissension? First, we should weep. It is a contradiction of the church as Christ designed it. Second, we should be careful. Paul warned Christians in Corinth that their meetings were hurting people instead of helping them.

I'm sure you've seen the television commercials advertising some hair growth formula or some new weight-loss program. They show the “before” and “after” pictures. In the “before” picture the guy has just a few fragile fluffs of hair; in the “after” picture he has a dandy mop on top. Or he's busting out of his trousers in one picture and in the second picture holding them out to show how many inches he's lost.

There really ought to be some “before” and “after” contrast to show the effectiveness of a church, don't you think?

It's scandalous when the "after" is worse than the "before" in a church—when people out there in the secular un-churched world treat each other with more honor and respect than the folks in church do.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century British Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, *'The devils are united as one man in their infamous rebellion, while we believers in Jesus are divided in our service of God, and scarcely ever work with unanimity.'* (C.H. Spurgeon)

He says the demons are united while the Christians are divided.

This is why the apostle Paul was so gung-ho about unity. Without unity, a church is an embarrassment in front of the watching world.

<sup>3</sup> *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Does this make any demands on us? Heavy demands, I'd say! *'Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.'* "Every effort"—that's a high priority.

- This is a familiar emphasis in Paul's letters.

To the church at Corinth he wrote, *'I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.'* (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Paul's final remarks in his second letter to the same church stress the necessity of unity among Christ's followers, *'Finally, brothers, good-bye. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.'* (2 Corinthians 13:11).

That expression, *'be of one mind'* was an idiom in the Greek language that we might express as *'be in loving agreement.'*

It's the same term Paul uses in Philippians 2:2, where he talks about *'being like minded,'* and in Philippians 4:2, where he calls for two women in the church to *'agree with one another.'*

- Now it's a fact that we don't have the natural ability to create this unity. It's a unity that is inextricably tied to the Holy Spirit's presence in a church.

The Holy Spirit is present in a church in Christians who have the Spirit of God in them.

Paul explained that *'... if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.'* (Romans 8:9)  
People who do not have the Holy Spirit are not Christians.

- This means that if a church doesn't maintain spiritual unity the issue becomes "How many people in the church are authentic Christians? How many actually have the Holy Spirit?"

The Apostle Paul confronted this head-on: *'Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?'* (2 Corinthians 13:5)

I'm convinced that those who have the Spirit of Christ are the ones in a church who are committed to the purpose Christ has given to his church. They are the people who maintain the unity of the Spirit.

- Unity is indisputably an essential quality of a healthy church

## **II. UNITY IS THE DIVINE DESIGN OF A CHURCH Ephesians 4:4-6**

In a healthy church unity works itself out in synergy.

A united church has more power and influence than the sum of individual Christians working at their separate functions. You can call this a holy synergy.

I read a story about the ancient battering rams used in battle. It's an example of unity. The battering ram was a large log which was repeatedly smashed against the doors of a walled city to break through. Now, supposing the attackers cut the log into pieces and beat on the door with separate sticks of wood, they would never have sufficient force to break through the gate. They'd all be dead meat!

Jesus spoke to Peter about the irresistible power of the church He would establish. He said, *'And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'* (Matthew 16:18)

Through his church God has been smashing into the realm where Satan has control and rescuing people from the dominion of darkness and bringing them into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Colossians 1:13)

That's our church's mission. We rescue people who are hopelessly trapped in their sin and bring them into the fullness of new life in Christ Jesus.

- If we don't have unity we are bound to fail in our mission.

<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called--*

<sup>5</sup> *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;*

<sup>6</sup> *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Unity is essential in all that God is doing in the world. (5, 6)

This unity that is grounded in the very nature of God is supposed to be the distinctive badge of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- There is strength in unity.

When I was a boy living in South Africa, the national motto, expressed in Afrikaans, was: “Eendrag maak mag”—*unity makes/is Strength*. It used to be stamped on their coins. It was, of course a blatant contradiction by the government that invented Apartheid—which means separation. It was just a motto. It wasn’t true. Because there was no real unity, the nation fell into disarray.

Years ago I read this useful little bit of data: One draft horse can move two tons of weight. But two draft horses in harness, working together, can move twenty-three (23) tons of weight. That’s synergy.

Synergy is the phenomenon of two or more people uniting in purpose to produce greater results than the sum of all of them working separately. This is true up to a certain optimum number.

- We should expect synergy in the church of our Lord Jesus.

If we make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, then synergy happens—and we will be amazed at the miraculous things that can happen in the ministry of our church. We won’t be able to explain them as the results of our efforts.

Our part is to maintain unity. The Holy Spirit turns unity into synergy.

Unity makes a church strong and effective in its work.

It’s up to you! It’s up to each one of us to do our part in maintaining this unity that God designed into his church.

If a church is united in obedience to Christ’s commission it will be synergized for service by the Holy Spirit. Unity is the most recognizable characteristic of a healthy church.

- Will you make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?