

**EPHESIANS: THE CHURCH FROM START TO FINISH**  
**"Part VIII: Achieving Practical, Precious, Costly Church Unity"**  
**(Ephesians 3:1-4:16)**

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

As has happened many times over the years, this past week I was approached by a concerned attendee of Nepaug Church who had some questions regarding relationship unity among believers in an area church. He was bothered by the fact that the gospel-preaching, Bible-teaching pastor of the group seemed to be under pressure!

His concern is a valid one; consider these facts:

(a) Bob Salstrom, former Alumni Secretary of Dallas Seminary, once said he had a stack of letters on his desk that was 18 inches high of Dallas Graduates. These grads had written to be placed in any church other than the one they currently pastored! They just wanted **out** of where they were at, no matter **where** it took them!

(b) This affects laymen directly: one recent statistic reports that the fastest growing churches in conservative Christian circles are generally not growing because of evangelistic outreaches! Rather, they are growing because unhappy folk are moving out of their former churches and looking for fellowship elsewhere!

**Well, WHY this DISUNITY?! If Jesus prayed that His people be ONE in John 17:20-21, what is going on?! Why are often Bible-teaching, Gospel-preaching PASTORS in the THICK of conflict when we are all supposed to be UNIFIED? What is the answer?!**

(We turn to the sermon "Need" section . . .)

***Need: "If Jesus prayed that believers all be unified (John 17:20-21), why is disunity in churches often the norm?! Why is it that even Bible preaching pastors are often in the midst of church conflicts?!"***

- I. **In Ephesians 4:1-3, Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers to preserve the unity which the Spirit had produced in the Church:**
  - A. Ephesians 4:1 begins Paul's exhortation to apply doctrine in his epistle for his readers, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, fn. to Ephesians 4:1.
  - B. That section has a call to preserve the unity produced by the Spirit:
    1. Paul urged the Ephesians to endeavor to keep the unity the Holy Spirit had produced, and that in the bond of peace, Eph. 4:3.
    2. This unity would reflect the seven positional unifying ties each believer has in Christ through the Spirit as stated in Eph. 4:4-6!
- II. **Paul reveals this PRESERVATION of unity is achieved as the result of the following proper functions by church LEADERS:**
  - A. Having stated his case in calling for Christian unity, Paul began a discussion on spiritual gifts of men in the pulpit, Eph. 4:7-11.
    1. Paul revealed that God had given spiritual gifts to believers, 4:7-11.
    2. The gifts he mentions in this section all have to do with **leadership** roles where men are gifted to **instruct others**, Eph. 4:11.
  - B. Paul then shows that God uses men gifted with these capacities to produce practical unity in the body as follows, Eph. 4:12-16:
    1. God uses men gifted as **instructors** of the **truth** to perfect the **saints** in the body **to do the work** of the ministry, Eph. 4:11-12.
    2. As a result, the whole body unifies around the **truth**, and fellowships with Christ so that individuals can mature, Eph. 4:13.
    3. This stops the relentless tossing back and forth of weak believers among **false** teachings that only breed **unrest**, Eph. 4:14.
    4. As a result, people speak the **truth** in **love**, and that leads to an explosion of mutually edifying ministries in the body, Eph. 4:15-16.
    5. In summary, **loving unity** is built on oneness of **belief** and fellowship with **Christ**, and that is the result of good **teaching!**
- III. **However, in exemplifying HOW such unity is developed, Paul, a Church leader himself revealed he faced TRIALS for his EFFORT:**
  - A. Paul, as an apostle, **instructed** the Ephesians on the **TRUTH** that **unifies** believers **opposite** the **error** of Judaists, Eph. 3:1-13 (At times such error even came from **fellow believers**, cf. Acts 15:1-2, 5):
    1. He revealed that God had wonderfully revealed through his ministry the bonding of Jew and (uncircumcised) Gentile in Christ, 3:1-6.
    2. He revealed that God's grace had selected him of all people who had persecuted the Church to share this news, Eph. 3:7-9.

3. He revealed that this body of unified believers of Gentile and Jewish origins reveals God's wisdom and power even to angels, 3:10-12.
- B. However, for **teaching** this, as is true of all who live godly in Christ Jesus (cf. 2 Tim. 3:12), **Paul** was *persecuted* by his enemies 3:1, 13.
- C. Yet, Paul **accepted** this trial as a **gainful PRICE** for real unity, 3:13.
- D. He also expressed a prayer that the Ephesian believers might be strengthened to understand God's infinite, loving acceptance of them in the Body of Christ **opposite** the beliefs of **Judaists**, Eph. 3:14-19.
- E. Overcome by focusing on the grace of God in this program, Paul broke out in a **joyful** doxology **though** in **prison**, Eph. 3:20-21.
- F. Based upon such divine **grace** toward Gentile and Jew, Paul urged his readers to be humble, gentle and patient with one another, Eph. 4:1-2.
- G. In doing so, they would **keep** the **unity** the Holy Spirit had forged in the bond of peace, a unity **contrary** to the Judaists' **ERROR**, Eph. 4:3

**Application:** (1) *Either the Pastor STOPS standing for the truth in order to have short-term "peace", only to yield long-term spiritual bankruptcy; (2) OR he stands for the TRUTH up FRONT, bringing short-term CONFLICT with long-term maturity and unity. (3) THIS Pastor chooses to teach the TRUTH up front, that (a) salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, Eph. 2:8-9. (b) He also teaches that every believer in the Church is UNWORTHY of God's blessing so that we all might sense our obligation to keep relating humbly, gently and patiently with one another. That preserves our unity! (4) Yet, know that this choice by the Pastor to promote TRUTH, as in Paul's case, will at times result in his facing troubles from those opposed to the truth! Thus, "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory!" (Eph. 3:13)*

**Lesson:** (1) *DISUNITY comes from (a) FALSE teaching, especially that which produces (b) pride, harshness and impatience in relationships, (c) for these foster competitive friction! (2) Conversely, practical unity is preserved by (a) teaching the TRUTH, especially the facts about God's GRACE in saving and placing all believers in the body of Christ. (b) The spread of truth, particularly that of God's grace leads to gratefulness that furthers humble, gentle patience in relations. (c) This all keeps the church unified long-term. (3) However, the STAND of the one teaching the TRUTH will cost his being persecuted short-term!*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . . )

I was asked by a Church member within the last two weeks to review Dr. Spiros Zodhiates' book, What About Divorce. Zodhiates believes God sanctions divorce and remarriage for an "innocent" party.

I felt it necessary to oblige this request as this work has been used by many Christians to sanction divorce and remarriage in their lives!

Well, in surveying the work, I discovered Dr. Zodhiates used the event in Deut. 22:13-21 to define what he sees is a 'God-sanctioned' divorce. On p. 48-49: he wrote : "If the husband suspected that his wife was unfaithful to him, there was a definite procedure whereby the truth could be found ...If the woman was **not** guilty she was **free** of the **marital relationship**, whether so pronounced by her husband or **not**."

However, in this very **text**, in Deut. 22:19b, the NIV says that **after** the woman has been **cleared** of the false charges: "She shall **continue** to be **his wife**; **he** must **not divorce her** as long as **he LIVES**." Startled that this statement so transparently contradicted Zodhiates' view, I checked my Hebrew Old Testament [Kittel's Biblia Hebraica, p. 297] and found the same passage reads literally as follows: "And **SHE shall continue being (tilyeh)** his **wife**; **HE** will **not** be able to **divorce** her **all** of his **days**." Clearly God wanted **both** the man **and** his wife to **STAY** wed -- for them to divorce was *expressly denied*!

I was **amazed** that, in spite of the **clear** teaching of the passage, **Dr. Zodhiates** claimed the woman was **free** of her **marriage**! I was astounded that **Christians** have used his book **instead of easily understood Scripture** as an authority to **justify** getting divorced and/or remarried! I was troubled that this has all happened when Lk. 16:18 teaches that **God** views divorce and remarriage as technical **adultery**! I was also concerned that my stand **opposite** his view has led to **years** of sometimes sharp, incessant opposition from misguided people!

Well, as pastor, I have a choice to make: I can either **agree** with Zodhiates in the name of "unity", producing short-term peace and long-term confusion and division; or I can still hold that **Scripture** does **not** sanction divorce and remarriage, and **continue** facing short-term trials while fostering eventual **godly** unity. For Christ's sake, I **again** chose the **latter**. Thus, I **CANNOT** recommend Zodhiates' book!

According to Ephesians 3-4, this **stand** is for **your true unity**! So, "faint not" at what I might face; it is for "your glory", Eph. 3:13!