

EPHESIANS: THE CHURCH FROM START TO FINISH
"Part IX: Practicing Unity By Exchanging Old Habits For New Ones"
(Ephesians 4:17-32)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) A deeply-divisive cultural challenge exists in America:

Kathleen Parker, a syndicated columnist in the Waterbury Republican-American mentioned in the 7/4/98 paper this issue: The American Association of University Women reported in a recent study that (a) girls are more likely than boys to be depressed and contemplate or attempt suicide, and (b) that boys are still called upon more frequently in class, and are more encouraged in math and science.

However, according to Parker, Christina Hoff Sommers, a **feminist** philosopher, professor and author, analyzed the report behind these claims and "found that the AAUW misstated a 1981 study, which actually said this: 'Boys, particularly low-achieving boys, receive eight to 10 times as many **reprimands** as do their female classmates. When both girls and boys are **misbehaving** equally, boys still receive more **frequent discipline**.'" Parker noted that boys truly score slightly higher on the average in science and math, but that girls surpassed boys on reading and writing skills, making better grades overall. More girls attend college and graduate schools than do boys! Regarding **suicide**, boys commit suicide four **times** more often than do girls!

Feminists in the AAUW against abusive adult **men** in their *pasts* is being used to foment an excessively negative attitude against **boys** with dire **future** effects!

Well, how does this **cycle of lurking anger fomented by way of misstatements ever end so we can have unity in our culture?!**

(2) This problem plagues **Christians** as well! An Evangelical marital counselor one day came to my office. She had come to ask if I would steer believers her way for counseling now that she had been through a difficult family failure and thus felt she could help others going through the same ordeal handle their stress! I replied that since the Bible requires we select leaders to be examples to the church men who had **not** had such family failures, I felt I could not recommend my parishioners to her as a **counselor** now that she had that failure on her record! She turned angry, stated I was as insensitive as her former husband, and walked out! I was left wondering if I was a chauvinist!

How do we actually arrive at REAL Church UNITY -- how do we KNOW we have it when it ARRIVES?!

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

Need: If Christians should live in UNITY, something often at a premium in our world, let alone amongst Christians, just WHAT will that mean by way of LIVING?! How can we tell if we are unified?!

- I. **After his call to preserve the Spirit's unity (Eph. 4:1-3) and saying that it occurs as leaders teach the truth (Eph. 4:7-16), Paul urged believers unto a LIFESTYLE change to reflect unity, Eph. 4:17-21.**
- II. **This LIFESTYLE CHANGE comes through operating by the NEW NATURE in place of the OLD SIN NATURE, Eph. 4:22-24:**
 - A. Christians are to replace the "old man" and its deceitful lusts with the "new man" lifestyle that is created in righteousness by God, 4:22-24.
 - B. From other texts, we get the following explanation of this action:
 1. The "old man" is the "old sin nature" whereby people live after the mindset and values of Satan's realm, cf. Eph. 2:2-3; Rom. 7:15-24.
 2. The "new man" is the new nature that God creates in one who believes in Christ for salvation from sin, John 7:38-39. This nature that is under the Holy Spirit's dominion equips the believer to live an upright lifestyle to God's glory, Gal. 5:16-17, 22-23.
- III. **Living by this NEW NATURE will produce the following practical lifestyle changes that sustain Christian UNITY, Eph. 4:25-32:**
 - A. Living by means of the new nature will **exchange** disunifying **lying** of one's past for telling unifying **truth** as a believer, Eph. 4:25.
 - B. Living by means of the new nature will **exchange** the divisive **harboring** of **anger** with unifying **"short accounts"** of anger, 4:26f:
 1. Paul noted that anger at what is **wrong** is a **necessity** if one is filled with the Holy Spirit who cannot tolerate sin. Accordingly, he actually **commanded** believers to **be** angry, Eph. 4:26!
 2. **However**, the **harboring** of even **righteous** anger can breed the temptation to "blow up" unrighteously, something the **Devil** loves to tempt believers to do to the destruction of church unity, 4:27 (Bib. Know. Com., N.T., p. 637). Thus, believers should keep "short accounts" with those with whom they have a problem, 4:26b.
 - C. Living by means of the new nature will **exchange** divisive **stealing** with unifying **personal achievement** that negates the need to steal:

1. Though we **usually** view stealing as taking an *object* belonging to another, a thief is one who unlawfully acquires another person's **intangible** possessions as well, things like relationships, honor or ministry. Thus, things like courting another's spouse or taking over another's ministry against his will are actually *stealing* activities.
 2. New Nature living causes one to fill his **needs** that lead to such **thefts** with *achieving* in proper realms by his **own** efforts in **God's power** so as to remove his temptation to steal, Eph. 4:28. In particular, it may mean working to improve one's own marriage or ministry so that God blesses in these areas, negating temptations to "steal" what belongs in these areas of life to other believers.
- D. Living by means of the new nature will **exchange** divisive **abusive speech** with truly **nurturing, unifying speech**, Ephesians 4:29-32:
1. Paul urged believers to **stop** their *grieving* His Spirit whereby they were sealed unto the day of redemption (Eph. 4:30 with the present imperative and subjunctive negative [the Greek = "*may lupeite*").
 2. What **grieved** the Holy Spirit in the context was the abusive speech believers used against one another with devastating effects on unity:
 - a. Both before this Eph. 4:30 command, in verse 29, and following it, in verse 31, Paul mentions the need to avoid abusive speech.
 - b. Specifically, the **negative** speech that hurt and devastated church unity was "rotten" (*sapros*, v. 29a) speech that expressed hostility (*pikria*, v. 31a), "outbursts of anger" (*thumos*, v. 31b), "settled feelings of anger" (*orgay*, v. 31c), "shouting or clamor" (*kraugay*, v. 31d), "slander" (*blasphaymia*, v. 31d) and "ill will" (*kaki a*, v. 31e) [Ibid., p. 637; Arndt & Gingrich, *Greek-Engl. Lex. of N.T.*, p. 749, 663].
 3. In place of such destructive speech, God wanted the unifying habits of "kind; suitable to fit a need" (*chraystoi*), "compassionate" (*eusplanchnoi*) and "gracious" (*charizomenoi*) speech, for Christ is kind (Eph. 2:7), compassionate (Mk. 1:41) and gracious (Rom. 8:32) to **us**, making us indebted to treat one another the same way, Eph. 4:32 (Ibid., Bib. Know. Com., N.T.).

Lesson Application: In **PRACTICAL** terms, Church unity can be measured by how well we believers in Christ (1) live by the Holy Spirit's power (a) to tell the truth to each other, (b) to deal with our righteous anger in "short accounts", (c) to respect another believer's "turf" in the realm of relationships and functions through working to succeed in our own proper niches and (d) to speak with words that edify by way of kind, compassionate, gracious expressions. (2) **DISUNITY** is measured in the degree the **OPPOSITE** of these occur! (3) So, may we follow Paul's command through Christ to be found operating in the first column!

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

We opened the sermon today by referring to the unhealthy anti-male attitude that is fomented by some AAUW feminists in response to their lingering wrath against abusive men of their pasts.

However, I experienced God's antidote to this problem this week as I witnessed it in our church body.

It happened at the Vacation Bible School follow-up meeting Monday night in our Fellowship Hall. Among a variety of subjects discussed was that of adult men and young men helping along with the women in our Vacation Bible School.

Both directors of this year's VBS, both Chris and Michelle Slate stated clearly how much they appreciated the children being exposed to the younger men who were teaching, as well as to the family men in Sean Couglin and the Pastor. Michelle noted how often children are led to believe that Christianity is a "woman's religion" because there are usually more women involved in its function as compared to men. She stated it was wholesome for the children to see the men involved.

I of course ratified the idea, for I believe that Christianity should copy the Biblical format that includes men in the family structure.

But what was of **special** value to *me* was the total absence of a negative feminist attitude in the whole meeting. I felt **welcome** as a **PERSON** in that room though Joshua Brunetti and I were the only males present. I sensed no competition or hidden revulsion because of my gender -- only acceptance in the Lord by fellow believers in Christ!

I remember later thinking, "**I wish that every feminist in America could view by way of a secret, hidden video the VBS meeting we had that night and SEE how we can heal this rift between feminists and males in our society! I wish they could see that, under the control of God's Spirit, we can all find acceptance, we can all find our mutually VALUED 'niches' in the Lord!**"

Spiritual unity is MEASURABLE in terms of how truthful, how kind and how careful we are at respecting each other's VALUE and to sense our spiritual oneness in Christ! Such unity comes only through every individual's right relationship to Christ, regardless of race, gender or ethnic heritage!