

INTRO - In 1965 my family moved from Easthampton, Massachusetts, to Gainesville, Florida. This was still the United States, and a University town where the University of Florida is found. But, there were some differences too. I remember attending the social event of the week most Fridays in the fall, the high school football games. A big part of these games were the band and the cheers. But, part of those songs was one played every game, a couple of times - Dixie. It was really exciting. There were rebel yells, and usually someone would shout, 'The South shall rise again.' I can look back now and see that in 1965, 100 years after the end of the civil war, emotions and resentment continued from the great divide of that conflict. When there is division or conflict, it takes a long time to overcome the result of that division.

I. Unfortunately, the history of the church is full of division.

A. Last week we heard about the division between Jews and Gentiles in the Church in Ephesus.

1. This week the warning was about being **tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.**

2. When there are different teachings about God, especially when there are teaching in the church that differ from God's word, this causes division.

3. Unfortunately, this division hurts the mission of God's church

B. But divisions don't only happen when there is wrong teaching. People divide for other reasons.

1. This week our Bible readings included Philippians 4. That's a great chapter.

But, did you hear verse 2. **²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord.** (NIV)

A. Imagine being known for disagreement.

B. Sometimes personal disagreements or personality conflicts are the cause of division in the church.

C. It happened with Paul and Mark.

2. Let's get a little closer to home. Do you know that when there is a major building project, the pastors often leave soon afterwards, maybe 50% of the time.

A. Now I can talk about this. We just bought a new house. I'm not planning on leaving,

B. When making decisions in a building process feelings can get hurt. And conflict can hurt the ministry.

3. Sometimes people forget whose church it is.

A. Ephesians 5:21 says, '**Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.** The church, the ministry, to teaching belongs to Jesus.

B. But sometimes people think the church belongs to them.

C. When people forget the church belongs to Jesus, and when people want their way in a church, again there can be division.

C. Unity helps the church proclaim Jesus as Lord and Savior. Division keeps God's people from working together to do what He calls us to do.

II. Next Sunday is Dedication Sunday at St. John. Let me tell you what I've told the last 2 Elders meetings, and the last 2 council meetings. I have told the Council that as our

Building project is nearing completion we have 2 jobs now. One is to overcome any hurt feelings and unify around the teaching of Jesus Christ. The other is to be active in doing God's work, in reaching out and sharing the love of God with others in our congregation, our community, and in our world.

A. But, it is always better to listen to the Lord. Listen to Ephesians 4:2-3.

1. **²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

2. God himself calls for unity in today's lesson.

B. This summer we have looked at God's practical advice for Christians. This advice is more aimed to a whole church than to individual Christians.

1. God says the church should unite in teaching and in ministry.

2. This unity will help. The ministry and work of the church for the Lord.

C. This description of unity is very similar to God's description of love in 1 Corinthians 13.

1. When there is unity in the church, according to this verse people are humble, and gentle, and patient, and bearing with one another.

2. There is peace.

3. So, today God speaks to congregations, to St. John. He calls for unity in belief that shows itself in acts of love.

III. Do you know that we have many high school seniors going away to college soon. Some have left. Some are leaving. This confirmation class had 20 young people. Three of them plan to study for professional church work. That is pretty impressive. They have been friends for years. Now I have watched there be small disagreements, but, because of Jesus, they have encouraged each other in faith, and worked together for the Lord. That is impressive. I have seen a unity in our youth.

A. Today's epistle talks about where that unity comes from.

1. We are not only told to **keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

2. We are told in Verses 4 - 6 say, **⁴There is one body and one Spirit -- just as you were called to one hope when you were called -- ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

3. Verses 15 and 16 say, **¹⁵Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. ¹⁶FROM HIM the whole body, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER by every supporting ligament, grows and BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE, as each part does its work.**

B. God's people may at times be divided, but God is one, and His church, the body is one, and there is one faith and one baptism.

1. When God's people focus on the teaching of God - He is one, and when they work together in love, there is unity in the face of division.

CONCLUSION - Yesterday I spent time with Wayne and Mae Woods reading things written by Shane. Many of you know Shane. We prayed for his safety in Iraq last week. He was killed on Tuesday. But, he was consistent in His writings. He trusted God for His love, and forgiveness, and salvation, and guidance. He believed He needed to put God's love into action, and he did.

Next Sunday we have a building dedication. It should be a great celebration. But, for us to use this building as a tool for God it is important that we are united in faith and in working together. We need to be united that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the World. We need to unite our efforts in sharing the Good news of Jesus with all our efforts.