

Preserving Unity

by Alan Martin

The sermon emphasizes the importance of preserving unity through peace and security in Christ amidst diversity and insecurity within the church community.

Scripture: Proverbs 14:30, Proverbs 17:1, Isaiah 32:17, Ephesians 4:1-3, Philippians 4:6-7

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of preserving the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. He emphasizes that unity is not something that needs to be created, but rather something that already exists and needs to be preserved. The speaker highlights that Christ has created one church, one faith, one Lord, and one baptism, but it is the actions of men that have caused division. He encourages the listeners to find their security in Christ and to receive others, even those who may believe differently, without feeling threatened.

Transcript

We've been speaking about the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace and I just want to speak a little bit more today about what we're to preserve. Ephesians chapter 4, the very first part of chapter 4, in verse 1, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling which you were called with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. Dina showed me something this week where the writer pointed out that it's interesting.

Unity is not something that you have to create. It already is. It's something you have to preserve.

Everything that Christ has done is one. It's one church, one faith, one Lord, one baptism, but what has happened once it's gotten into the hands of men, you know, men break it apart and restrict it down to here we've got the perfect doctrine here and this is the perfect way here, but they've created the division. Christ creates unity.

Then there's one spirit and one faith and one Lord and one baptism. I want to speak a little bit more about preserving the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. When peace is not present, it's not a pleasant place.

Look with me, if you will, Proverbs 17.1. Someone, if you don't mind, would someone read that nice and loud for us, Proverbs 17.1. I know what the NIV says. Most of us could testify to experiencing this, and I think the NIV says, better a dry morsel where there is peace than a house full of feasting with strife. Look and flip back to the same book of Proverbs, chapter 14, verse 30.

Proverbs 14, verse 30 says, a heart at peace is what? Life to the body. A heart at peace is life to the body, but envy or a broken spirit dries up the bones. Envy rots the bones.

It's not strange then, it shouldn't be strange to us that the way that the life of the body of saints, the body of Christ, is going to be preserved by the bond of peace. And I just want to talk about some of the things this morning that, if we're not careful, can unsettle others when we're not at peace. Now there are many things that can disturb your peace, but I really want to talk about not the things that can disturb your peace.

I really want to talk about the things you can do to keep your peace from being disturbed. You don't have to be disturbed if you learn to look to Christ and the Father in all situations. Turn to Isaiah, chapter 26, in verse 3. Perhaps some of you have memorized this as a Bible memory verse at one time.

Isaiah, chapter 26, verse 3. Would someone read that for us? You will keep in perfect peace. Who's the you? Who's being talked to here? The Father. God will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast.

How is a person's mind steadfast, according to this verse? Because it's trust or it's stayed upon God. What happens to you and I when our mind is no longer stayed upon God? But we begin to look at that source of pressure we're feeling pressure from. Because that's what disturbs often your peace.

You're feeling pressure from someone. Someone has a conviction or an understanding and they're exerting a pressure on you. Or you're just feeling pressure.

And when you begin to look at them. When you, even if it's just comparing yourself with them. If you're not looking to God, the Father.

If you're not finding all of your hope in His favor. In being pleasing unto Him. If you begin to be concerned about what that other person is thinking about you.

What's going to happen to your peace? It's gone. You will not have peace. Sadly, experience has taught me that some of the most destructive people in the church are insecure people.

Insecure. Their insecurity is a source of disturbance. Because an insecure person is not looking to God to protect them.

If they're insecure, they're fearful. And if they're fearful, they see others that are pressuring them as a threat. Instead of a need.

There is, I wish we could eliminate all sources of difficulty when we relate to other people. But I believe as long as we're going to live in this life. Because we can only see in part.

We can only prophesy in part. We can only know in part according to the Apostle Paul. That we are going to have a different understanding from others around us.

We're actually told, let's go to Romans chapter 14. We're told that that's going to be. Romans chapter 14.

The first part of the chapter. Verse 1 of Romans 14. Receive one who is weak in the faith.

But not to disputes over doubtful things. A little more literal translation of that would be. Now the one being weak in the faith.

Receive. But not unto judging through in dialoguing. People want to dialogue about things.

Especially if they are weak in the faith. Some things are. It's very important to them that you see it exactly their way.

That's very important to someone weak in the faith. Because he's concerned that if you think differently than him. He feels threatened by that.

This source of insecurity among saints. Is a great disturbance to the bond of peace. Let me encourage you.

The only person that you need to be pleasing in the eyes of. Are the Lord. If there is a godly person.

Of course you would. One that is very mature in the Lord. It does make sense to those who walk with the wise become wise.

But only those who have really found their security in Christ. And you are secure in your faith. You are assured that God loves you.

You are going to be a ministering spirit. Of peace. In your family.

In your church. From family to family. Because here is what happens.

Let's just create a scenario. That might speak to why Jesus would say. Blessed are the peacemakers.

For they are the children of God. When the father wanted to reconcile the world to himself. He sent his son.

The people that were in sin. And deceived. And living according to what was right in their own eyes.

He came to them. And what did he preach? He came and preached peace. To them who were near.

Peace to those who were far away. For he himself is our peace. And that is what he came to do.

Is to bring about peace. Now. Look at the opportunity you have to be a peacemaker.

When, if you have strength in the Lord. You can bear with the failings of the weak. Because what happens when you are insecure.

And you run into situations. Where you are feeling the pressure from someone. Pressuring you about their convictions.

We will just say this one directly. You are challenged in some area. About their conviction.

If you are insecure. What do you do usually? What is your normal reaction? You defend yourself. Well.

Who do you. People normally defend themselves from friends. So what has happened in your mind when you are insecure? How do you see a brother? As an enemy.

You have already. See the bond of peace is already broken. When suddenly that person.

Because of your insecurity. Is a threat to you. Instead of a needy person.

Are you following that? Do you see me? They are pressuring you. They are not right in an area. But your insecurity is every bit as bad.

As their idea. And you are no more a help to a situation. When you turn around.

And say to your friend. That you are secure with. That is not making peace.

That is not preserving the unity of the spirit. A secure person. Secure in the love of Christ.

Blessed with a sense of God's love. Can take pressure from the outside like that. And become a peacemaker.

By bearing with. Because they are secure in Christ. They are secure in the love of Christ.

They know that they are okay. And they are not concerned. Do you realize? That insecure people do not even have to be pressured.

Directly. To be disturbed. If you are insecure about the way you dress.

And someone comes in. In a cape dress. With a head covering on.

All the time. How do you feel? You know what a cape dress is? It goes all the way down to your ankles. It usually has an apron on top of that.

And they have a head covering on. Covering their head. How do you feel? You should not feel anything.

If you are secure. Does it make you feel immodest? If you are insecure it does. Did they say anything to you? No.

We need to come to the place where you are at peace. If you before God. Have weighed carefully.

What modesty is. And you are seeking to honor the scripture. Then do not be intimidated by.

Someone who is not even trying to intimidate you in the first place. They are seeking to do. What is right before God.

And in the same passage in Romans. What does it say? Let everyone be fully convinced. Where? In their own mind.

And if you allow yourself to allow the enemy. To begin to draw you into questions. About whether you are acceptable.

In their eyes. It is your insecurity. That the Lord is drawing out.

He is wanting to draw that out. And deal with it. Till you find your security in Him.

Have you ever noticed in the world. God likes variety. And diversity.

He did not make us all the same color. He did not give us all the same culture. And we need to learn.

To find our security in Christ. And when we do so. The bond of peace will be preserved.

As we receive one another. It is easy to receive someone. Who in your mind.

Believes exactly like you do. What challenge is that? That is not a challenge. But when there is someone.

Who you can tell with your eyes. They obviously believe differently than I do. Can you receive them? Can you receive them.

Without being threatened? Can you receive them secure? Can you receive them knowing. You know what? They must be convinced of a way. A little bit different than I am.

If you are able to do that. The peace in your heart. Will be life.

To this body. You see that? But your insecurity. Your insecurity.

Will be a source of trouble. That the enemy will use. To exploit you.

By creating. Divisions that only exist. In your mind.

There is not. Division. In the mind of Christ.

And from the head. The whole body is joined together. Now when is the last time for you.

That your foot. Told your hand what to do. I don't think it ever works that way.

And it doesn't. It doesn't work that way in the body of Christ. You receive your instructions.

From the head. Who is Christ. And you do not.

Allow yourself to be intimidated by. Now that is not an invitation. For you to be a stone wall.

To say I do not care what other people think. I wish. I wish we were.

Of a nature that we are not so flesh and blood. Because you know what. One of the things.

What flesh and blood has the ability to feel. Pain. And many people.

Because they do not want to feel pain. Develop a hardness. And you know in their hardness.

They mistakenly. Use the terminology. Well I don't care.

That is the wrong thing. Because. The ability to not feel pain.

Conversely. Or consequently. Reduces your ability to experience joy.

Do you realize that. Some spiritual men have said. That how God enlarges our capacity.

To experience His joy. Is through the process of experiencing pain. Joy is an intense feeling.

Isn't it? Pain is an intense feeling. And sorrow is an intense. And we don't want to get to where.

There is a tendency in the world. To isolate yourself. To insulate yourself from pain.

To begin to associate only with those. Who never challenge you. With whom you feel very secure.

I want to come to a place. This is some place that I have been in the past myself. As I have been insecure.

I wanted my family to be around. Only certain ones. Because I was concerned about the influence.

We have to avoid all extremes. There is some wisdom. In guarding who we are around.

But our Lord Jesus. Could be as comfortable dining at Zacchaeus house. Or the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus.

You know. If He was invited to the Pharisees house for dinner. He went.

And if it was one of His close friends. He went. And we need.

We need a maturity. In Christ. To where our heart is so filled with His peace.

That we ourselves are not unsettled. By others around us. Then we become peacemakers.

Okay. Peacemakers. Instead of being affected wrongly.

Now. Let's look at one other passage real quick. I don't have a lot more on my heart this morning.

But I do want to look in Philippians. A very common passage here. Philippians chapter 4. Let's start with verse 4. Philippians 4. Verse 4. Rejoice in the Lord always.

And again I will say rejoice. Let your forbearing spirit. Is the way I like to see that word translated.

Or your gentleness. Is another way. A good translation.

Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing.

But in everything. Through prayer and supplication. With thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known to God. Let me give you a practical application of that. Because you're going to find believers of all kinds.

If you're really open. You're going to find believers of all kinds. Now that may surprise you.

But it's been my experience. That we have all kinds of believers come and stay with us. At our house.

Where they come in short shorts. And they come in cape dresses. And we'll have them in the same room at the same time sometimes.

We have Sabbath keepers. That believe that Sabbath is the day. We have Sunday keepers.

That they're in the house at the same time. And no keepers. Yeah we have some that don't believe you should ever meet at all.

We have some that don't believe there should be any pastors. You know. And of all kinds.

Let me give you a practical example about being anxious for nothing. In this great diversity that we run into. And someone shares an idea that might actually cause me to be seen not in a very good light.

You know. Like sitting up here. You know I've been told that sitting up here is exalting myself over the people.

That's not what I intend to. I just intend to stand before the people like the Bible says. But I have one option in that.

I have an option when I hear something like that. What do I do? If I'm insecure. I'm threatened by that.

If I'm secure in the Lord's love. I say Lord I sure didn't know that. If that's true Lord.

Show me. And if it's not true. Show them.

That's peaceful. No I'm not threatened by anything. I'm willing to learn.

I can listen. I can hear. You know.

Some of you ladies. Look I can see. Some of you have short hair.

Some of you have long hair. Which one's right? Can't you just say Lord show me? You don't have to be intimidated by the lady who has hair all the way down to her bottom. You know some of you will have jewelry.

Some of you won't. You do not have to be anxious about that. If you are looking to Him who can keep you in perfect peace.

Then you take that situation. And you know your first calling is as members of one body. We were called to peace.

And you don't let the enemy suddenly come in and unsettle you. And cause you to feel threatened by other people. You just look to Christ.

You know He loves you. And you know He will teach you. He will guide you in what is right.

And do so. And walk in that. And if you walk lowly.

You know if you're a person lowly in their mind. They say well this is what I think now. But I know I only know in part.

I know I only can understand in part. And so it's possible I'll have more understanding come in this area. But I am not threatened.

And Dina and I have gone through big changes. You know some of you hopefully would say even since I've been here. You know big changes.

And a lot of that has been your patience. And giving me time to learn and to grow. But we really both of us when we look back.

And when we remember days when we were. I know some of you probably think we still are. But when our zeal was even more intense than it is somewhat moderated.

Hopefully it's mellowed a little bit. But in days when we were so convinced that we had it. We knew it and you needed to know it.

And we were going to stand in front of you and make sure you knew it. Now. And you needed to decide today.

I mean it's out of love of course. All of this was very sincere. We wished at that time.

That we had met more people so full of grace. That they weren't threatened by us. You know that they could come alongside us.

And kind of like Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos. And recognize his sincerity and his genuineness. And come alongside.

And instruct him in a way even more adequately. I think without trying to show him where he's wrong. But just add that missing element.

Because it is. A person full of the peace of Christ. Really preserves unity.

We've seen it. And when you're in. Each of you will have your opportunity.

Because you will meet insecure people. And if they're weak that day. If they're struggling that day.

Or they've had an experience. Where that security in Christ is tested. By the interaction they're having with someone else.

Be a peacemaker. Preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. You find that when you yourself are secure.

The Bible says. Look at this last passage. And then we'll close.

In Isaiah chapter 32. Isaiah 32 verse 17. The fruit of righteousness.

And those of you who have been here a while. We know. How does righteousness come? Righteousness comes only one way.

How's that? By faith. So he's talking about the fruit of someone. Who really knows God loves them.

Okay. Believes in God's love. The fruit of righteousness will be what? Peace.

And the effect of righteousness. Quietness. And confidence.

Forever. My peaceful. My people, excuse me.

My people will live in peaceful dwelling places. In secure homes. And in undisturbed places of rest.

Now the Bible says. No matter how many promises God has made in Christ Jesus. They are yea and amen.

There is one undisturbable place of rest in the world today. Where is that place? In Christ. These things Jesus said to his disciples.

These things I have spoken unto you. That in me you might have peace. In this world you shall have tribulation.

So where are you looking? If you are not experiencing this undisturbed peace. Ask yourself. Have you taken your eyes off of Christ who loves you? And are you suddenly wondering about whether you are okay with brother Alan? Or with this family? Or with this individual? Don't do that.

You find your peace in Christ. And if you look to Christ. And you will in him have an ability to be challenged.

To interact with others different than you. Convinced of something in their mind different than you are in yours. Without feeling threatened.

Without having your peace disturbed. And those kind of saints have a beautiful effect on those around them. Just like the Bible says about the unfading beauty of a meek and quiet spirit.

Which is of great worth in the eyes of God. This same quality of life spiritually is beautiful. When you are full of peace.

The peace of Christ. And your effect in interacting with others. Is a quiet calming preservation of the unity that is Christ and is in Christ.

It's a wonderful thing. And we need more of it. And so let's search our hearts.

Let's close our eyes and just search our hearts. And just say Lord search us out. And in those areas where we are insecure.

Help us not look to our own weaknesses. To try to shore them up and see others as threats. Let's ask the Lord when you feel that insecurity.

To bring you into the assurance of his love. So that you can say like the Apostle John. Therefore we know and rely on the love God has for us.

And you can say this with me. Because in love what is cast out? Fear. In perfect love fear is cast out.

And peace is preserved. So let's just be still a moment or two. If you would.

And ask the Lord to continue in his loving way that he is able to train us. To cleanse us from any self defensiveness. Insecurity.

Any sense of seeing others as threats. And just bring us into that beautiful place of rest. Where we really know and we are very assured of his love.

Alright let's live that this week. Stand with me. And I want to read one passage on how to do.

How do you deal with others? When you think differently. Listen to the experience of the Apostle Paul. This is right after the passage where he says.

He forgets what lies behind. And he strains forward to what lies ahead. Because he wants to know Christ.

And the power of his resurrection. And the fellowship of his sufferings. In that same passage.

Right after he says. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. He says.

Therefore let as many as are mature. Have this mind. That mind of pressing on.

And then he adds. And if in anything you think differently. God will reveal even this to you.

Only let us live up to what we have all attained. Let us walk by the same rule. Let us be of the same mind.

Do you know what the same mind is? Peace be to you brother. Peace to you. Grace and peace to you.

You don't have to think the same thing as I do and everything. Grace and peace to you. Let's preserve the unity of the spirit in that way.

Brother Ray White. Would you close in a word of prayer.

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