



Presbyterian Reformed Church of Australia

"your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" psalm 119:108

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Sermon Meta Information

Title:	Cherishing the unity of the congregation.		
*URL:	http://www.prc.org.au/resources/sermon/trevor-marshall/html/tm-20070204.html		
Preacher:	Trevor Marshall	Location:	Brisbane South
Passage:	Ephesians 4: 1-6	Date:	4 February 2007
Sermon Series:	-	Series Number:	-

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Sermon

Introduction

Two of the greatest blessings a congregation can have are unity and peace among its members. Unity and peace are like very precious, but delicate flowers that need great care and hard work. God gives unity and peace to the congregation, and requires them to maintain that unity and peace. Listen to the Apostle Paul urging the churches at Ephesus, Philippi, and Rome to continue working on their unity and peace.

*'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.'* **Ephesians 4:1-6**

*I implore Euodia and I implore Syntyche to be **of the same mind in the Lord**. And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life'.* **Philippians 4:2-3**

'Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfil my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.' **Philippians 2:1-4**

*'Therefore let us **pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another**. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.'* **Romans 14:19-20**

In these passages of Scripture we find three goals which each one of us should to make our own.

1. Strive to promote unity and peace in every situation.

- a. We are a congregation comprising of people of all ages from different races, backgrounds, cultures and personalities. God has given us each other to be brothers and sisters in Christ. Unity must mean that we have a conscious sense of belonging to one another, loving each other, sharing the same purposes and goals, and are of one mind concerning the glory and enjoyment of God. The bond that unites us in Christ, by the Spirit, through the word ought to compel us to love each other as much as Christ loves us. Christ our Lord and King would have us love each other so much that we would be prepared to die for one another. Would you be prepared to die for me? Would I be prepared to die for you? If you and I submit to Christ Jesus then the answer must be, 'yes.' This high demand ought to make it very clear that true Christian unity isn't shallow, nor is it superficial. Our concept of unity and peace must originate in the Scriptures and not from a comparison with the world as the age we live in is extremely shallow and superficial.
- b. How can we promote the peace and unity of this congregation? Each one of us needs to ask; *'What can I do to promote the peace and unity of this congregation?'* What I can do and what the Lord expects of me is to have the right attitude towards others. You and I need to examine ourselves and determine whether or not our attitude conforms to the standard set by Christ in the Bible? Putting yourself under the spotlight of the Word can be very painful as the light will reveal all the flaws and imperfections. One of the most common remarks on my School report card was, *'There is a room for improvement.'* I have no doubt that, that comment was true, valid and very applicable, but I was very comfortable with *living with room for improvement*. I was comfortable as my marks were never the worst and I never came last in the class. Those who did worse than me made me feel very good about myself. I calculated my achievement by their failures and always felt satisfied. The attitude I adopted at school can be found in the church among Christians. Delinquents make backsliders feel and look good. As long as there are members who are worse than me in doing their duties, responsibilities and obligations I feel comfortable with my life in the church. The church can not criticise me if there is someone worse than me. It is so easy to make what others are doing the standard you measure yourself by, rather than use the Scriptures as the standard.
- c. Listen to the categorical statement Paul makes in **Philippians 2: 3** *'in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.'* Listen to **William Hendriksen's** comments on this verse, *'It is the happy condition which arises when in a church each member counts the other to be better than himself. Thus the members, filled with tender affection, will be outdoing one another in showing honour (Rom. 12:10). But is not this rule impracticable? How can a man who knows that he is industrious regard the rather lazy fellow-member as being better than himself? The answer will probably be somewhat along this line: a. The rule does not mean that one must consider every fellow-member to be in every respect wiser, abler, and nobler than he is himself. b. As a general principle the rule certainly should control our lives, for while to a certain extent (never **completely**, see Psalm 139:23, 24; Jer. 17:9) a Christian is able to scrutinize **his own** motives (I Cor. 11:28, 31), and knows that they are not always good or unmixed, which knowledge leads him at times to utter the prayer, "O Lord, forgive my **good deeds!**" he has no right to regard **as evil** the motives of his brothers and sisters in the Lord. Unless a consistently wicked pattern is clearly evident in the life of one who has with his mouth confessed the Lord, that individual's outwardly good deeds must be ascribed to **good** and never to **evil** motives. On this basis it clearly follows that a truly humble child of God, who has learned to know **himself** sufficiently so that at times he utters the cry of the publican (Luke 18:13), or of Paul (Rom. 7:24), will regard **others** to be indeed better than himself. And not only **better** but **in certain respects abler**, for the Lord has distributed his gifts (I Cor. 12). There is generally something, of value to the kingdom, which the brother or sister can do better than you or I.' To esteem others better than yourself means you never, never *impute evil or uncharitable motives* to anything good they do. Be much quicker to praise rather than criticise your brothers and sisters in the Lord. This would apply to those you think are worse than you are in doing what the Lord requires.*

- d. Paul in **Philippians 2:3-4** tells us how to promote peace and maintain the unity in the congregation: *'Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.'* There are three matters that test whether or not we have the right attitude towards our brothers and sisters who are very precious to the Lord.
- i. *Are you continually working at putting **selfishness** to death?* Paul says, *'Do nothing out of selfish ambition.'* If you are promoting yourself, you cannot promote peace and unity in the congregation. If I am always concerned about *me*, I can never be preserving peace. The Greek word used here was applied to politicians who sought to promote their own interests and advance their status. Our Premier gives us a good idea of the meaning of the word when he confesses that he is unashamedly a *mediatart*. Was this what *Euodia* and *Syntyche* were doing in the congregation in Philippi. Were *Euodia* and *Syntyche* promoting themselves, their cause and dividing the congregation? Paul's message to them is, *'Examine yourselves to determine whether or not selfish motives are playing a part in the dispute you have with one another.'* In the world selfishness and self-centredness are the most natural and normal focus. People in the world are obsessed with self; all that matters is personal happiness. All actions and motives begin and end with what *'is in it for me/??'* Those who belong to Christ are filled with the Spirit and strive to *'do nothing out of selfish ambition.'* **Put selfishness to death.** We need to remind ourselves frequently that Jesus is *number one*, all other believers are *number two's* and you are the only *number three*.
- ii. *Are you continually dealing with sinful **conceit**?* Conceit and selfishness are very similar - *selfishness* focuses on personal goals while *conceit* focuses on *self-importance*. You know you have a serious dose of *conceitedness* when you develop the *sense of being indispensable*. When you feel that no body in the congregation can do things as well or as efficiently as you do. When you feel sorry for the church because it desperately needs what you bring to it and it would not survive if it was not for you. *Self-importance* is sinful as it places the emphasis on what you can do and not on God who enables you to do all that you do. What skill, talent, gift or ability do you have that did not come from God?
- iii. *Are you obsessed with your **own interests**?* Paul says, *'Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.'* It is sinful to always be preoccupied with your own personal interests. Pursuing your own interests is not sinful, but can become sinful if that is all you do. If you are so busy looking after your own interests that you do not have time to help others you have not dealt with the issues of selfishness and conceit God's way. If we deal with the sins of selfishness and conceit God's way, we will give ourselves to helping one another. We all have very busy lives; finding time to do all that we would like to do and need to do is very difficult. To promote the unity and peace of the congregation we must find time to help each other. As **Matthew Henry** says, *'We must love our neighbour as ourselves, and make his case our own.'* Most women are better than men at *'not only looking out for their own interests, but also for the interests of others.'* Men can learn much from women in this regard. Women who pay keen attention to the interest of others need to be mindful of the fact that they will be severely tempted to gossip. If your interest in others is for the purpose of gossip recognize that you are sinning. Gossip is an enemy of Christian love. If I thought for a moment that another persons interest in me was for gossip purposes I would be tight lipped and actually avoid talking to a gossip. Our interest in each other must be driven and motivated by the love of Christ that abides in us. About four years ago a young couple attended a few worship services with a view to joining us. In conversation with them they gave their primary reason for leaving the church they previously attended as: *'The church failed to meet our needs.'* My response to this was, *'I am sorry to hear that your needs were not met, but were you actively involved in meeting the needs of the other members in that congregation?'* They did not answer my question or visit the congregation again. To promote peace and unity in the congregation find time to invest in others and help them. Being part of a congregation is not about *what is in it for me, but how can I show love for others?*

2. **Strive to be involved in mutual edification.**

- a. Paul in **Romans 14:19-20** says, *'Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.'* **Geoff Thomas** is correct when he says; *The peace of a congregation has to be an edified peace, an educated peace, a discerning peace, a growing peace, a maturing peace. There is peace in a graveyard, in a refrigerator and in a chapel at midnight. We don't want that; this peace comes from a united people who are mutually being disciplined together.'* We are disciples of Jesus and we are learning from him everyday. Our concept of teaching involves a teacher communicating a body of knowledge to students. As disciples of Jesus we strive to absorb his teachings *and also to become like him in every way.* We learn Jesus' teaching so that by the power of the Holy Spirit we become like him. Christians should be marked by their insatiable desire to learn more about their Lord. Is learning more about our Lord a priority in your life? Do you find the time and make the effort to learn from your brothers and sisters in Christ what they know about the God of all grace and comfort?
- b. Notice Paul calls on us to **pursue the things by which one may edify another.** The Greek word translated here as *pursue* could be used to describe the painstaking search for a dangerous fugitive. We must actively, deliberately, purposely and constructively seek things that may edify others. You need to see mutual edification as part of your Christian duty and responsibility towards your brothers and sisters in Christ. Not to see this as a vital aspect of your Christian life means you have glossed over every reference in the New Testament that uses the phrase *one-another*. Concerning the one another aspect of the Christian life the Holy Spirit has caused the following to be written in Scripture: *"be devoted to one another," "honour one another," "love one another," "accept one another," "instruct one another," "greet one another," "serve one another," "bear with one another," "be kind and compassionate to one another," "admonish one another," "encourage one another and build each other up," "spur one another on," "live in harmony with one another," "greet one another with a kiss of love."* If we are failing to do these things the unity and the peace of the congregation is seriously weakened as we are not being obedient to the Word.
- c. We all need mutual edification. It is as **Geoff Thomas** says, *'The most brilliantly gifted church members cannot dismiss the weakest church members with, "I have no need of you" (I Corinthians 12:21). God has locked us into a body, in living contact with the Head, sustained by its one blood stream. Preachers in particular need the countless little services which every Christian has to offer. We need the encouragement, the rebuke, the company, and the down-to-earth word that demolishes humbug and pretentiousness. To pretend to self-sufficiency, emotionally and otherwise, is to risk warping our own personalities and ending up in foul spiritual deformity. Make every effort to do what leads to mutual edification, in other words as you give to others you are edified in the giving, and they are edified in the receiving.'* We need to be very honest and even brutal with ourselves on this matter and confess that *we have no excuse for disobeying God on this matter.* Whatever excuse you have, no matter how valid it seems it is totally destroyed by the truth of **Philippians 4:13** which says *'I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.'* You have no excuse for not *'pursuing things by which one may edify another.'*

3. **Strive not to damage the work God is doing.**

To those Roman believers who have caused a division in the church about what could and could not be eaten Paul says, *'Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food.'* God was at work in the church at Rome, transforming the lives saved sinners and filling them with assurance and grace. Through the church God was calling sinners chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world to repent and believe in the Saviour. Would we dare interrupt this work by grieving and quenching the work of the Holy Spirit? Would we dare interfere with this work by provoking our heavenly Father to discipline us? Would we dare impede this work by causing sorrow in Jesus heart by giving our time, energy, effort and zeal to matters that are of little consequence? **Geoff Thomas** paraphrases Paul's

rebuke to the Church at Rome as follows: *Why should the work of God be brought to a halt by endless discussions about peripheral matters like diet and days? Will you destroy the work of God in the most important city of the whole world, Rome, for food? Make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification.*¹ We need to promote the peace and the unity of the congregation by focusing on things that edify and not things that are of little consequence.

Conclusion

We ought to give God praise and thanks for the peace and unity we as a congregation enjoy. We all need to ***strive to promote unity and peace in every situation, strive to be involved in mutual edification and strive not to damage the work God is doing.*** May our Lord be gracious and grant us the wisdom and conviction to be obedience to his word.