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Unity in the Local Congregation

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“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” - Galatians 3:28

As the apostle Paul was working through the layers of feelings, issues and troubles that Jewish brethren had towards the Gentiles, our verse was a reminder that in Christ we are all one. Now, that looks great on paper, but when one tries to practice this, often maintaining unity is much harder than anyone anticipated.

We see this in the family. After services, he says, “Where do you want to go to eat?” All the kids have different suggestions. One wants chicken strips. Another hates chicken strips. One wants soup. Another hates soup. One wants a hamburger. Dad is thinking steak. Mom is thinking something healthy. And, the littlest one only wants ice cream. And, before a decision is made, weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth take place.

Now, magnify and multiply our opinions, backgrounds, experiences and likes and dislikes and we ask, “How is it possible for a church to be in unity?” Throughout the N.T. letters we find expressions such as, “one mind,” “one accord,” “one voice,” “same love.” But too often, the fellowship can look more like mom, dad and the kids trying to decide where to eat. And, by the time a place is picked out, someone is mad, someone refuses to eat, and the atmosphere has a dark cloud hanging over it.

There are some things that ought to help us:


First, understand that we are not all going to see things the same way. There will be differences. How many songs ought to be sung. Just throw that question out for discussion one Sunday. Everyone has an idea. What’s the best way to serve the Lord’s Supper? Should a church be involved with electronic banking? Which translation is the best? Should services open with a prayer or a song or a greeting or a reading of a passage?

Second, what we do with disagreements shows a lot of what we are made of. Do we declare everyone who disagrees with me a false teacher and in error? Do I want them to do that towards me if I disagree with their opinion? Like the kids in the car, we can pout. We can leave. We can try to win people to our side, like a politician at election time. Or, as the Ephesians were told, we can be subject to one another. For two minds, two hearts, two opinions, two ideas to become one, there must be a coming together. Pressure, bullying, threats are not the Biblical manner of dealing with differences. One may get their way, but the “one mind, heart, voice” stuff won’t be there.

Third, good communication, love for one another and a whole bunch of Jesus sure helps. Kids remember who got to choose the last time. They keep track of those things. Disciples don’t. The spirit of the disciple is the spirit of Jesus. God has shown us a pattern to follow. Within that pattern, are certain judgments. As long as one stays within the pattern, the judgments are allowable. And, many of these judgments are personal and individual. As one walks with the Lord, he’ll find others, right alongside of him, that may be walking beside him, not behind him, nor in front of him. This beside me concept means he will not place his foot in the exact spot I place my foot. Does that make me uncomfortable? Does that mean one of us must change? As we both follow Jesus, side by side, we will have different ways, or judgments, that we feel are necessary to be with the Lord.

Unity is not about me changing you, so you will look like me. Nor is it you changing me to be more like you. It's both of us trying to be like Jesus. And, what better way to see this than in how God used the personalities of those who wrote the Bible. All the Bible is from God. It is inspired. However, the books do not read the same. Straightforward Proverbs and James do not read like Romans or Ezekiel. God used the personalities of each writer to express His will. There is one central message, yet the Bible writers were not the same. And, such in a congregation, we each follow the Lord, but what that means is different. I like to get to the church building hours before we start on Sunday. Some slide in at the last second, literally. Is my way better? No. It works for me. Could I switch and slide in at the last? I'd be a nervous wreck if I tried that. What works for me is not what works for others. We can try to change each other or realize that we are both worshipping God and we are both here before things begin. As long as we both stay Biblical and right behind the Lord, we can be in unity.

Getting along and getting along well is a mark of maturity, spiritual strength and love for the Lord. Some places are like that family in the car trying to decide where to eat. Others, seem to run much smoother and operate with an understanding of how great it is to serve the Lord.

Shepherd? God is faithful, He sustains and will never permit the righteous to be moved but He also does desire and require that all humankind come to repentance according to 2 Peter 3:9. 

Do You Know Everything?

- by James Hahn

This is a question I am often asked when I raise questions concerning some doctrine or practice. The implication of this question is that one must know everything to be certain about anything.

Each time I hear this view expressed I think of the story of the blind man healed by Jesus. The story is recorded in the ninth chapter of the book of John. The Jews were intent upon condemning Jesus and did all they could to discredit the miracle performed by Jesus. Seeing the blind man now able to see they first questioned as to whether he was the same man. After his parents confirmed his identity and the fact that he was born blind they again question the man and tried to pressure him by saying, "Give God the praise: we know that this man is a sinner" (John 9:24). The man replied "Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25).

This man recognized that even though he may not know everything this did not keep him from knowing and being certain about some things. No, I do not know everything but I can say with the apostle Paul, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2Timothy 1:12).