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1 Corinthians

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Suggestions for Maintaining Unity

1 Corinthians

Thesis: Biblical Love keeps no record.

Introduction

A. In the accounting world the accountant’s job is to make sure all monies are accounted for so that the books balance or show the proper financial state of the person(s) or business(es) that are being serviced or audited. A checks and balances of expenditures and monies received. Biblical love does not operate this way, and is the key to solidify unity and maintain it, thanks to the Holy Spirit letting us know through God’s word what true Godly love is and how it looks when we practice it, and the Holy Spirit through Paul, will give us the guidance we need in 1 Corinthians 13.

Body

1. Is maintaining unity keeping records of faults on those we love?
   1. Exposition — Do we keep mental records on those we love every time we have a disagreement? Do we have a memory like an elephant in every negative conversation we have? At times when we are in a disagreement or a quarrelsome way with others do we bring up all their faults and short-comings? The church at Corinth was dividing into factions (erithia) and claiming to follow Paul, Apollos, or Cephas (Peter), and some were arrogant enough to depend on their own knowledge. (1 Corinthians 1:10-12, 14 & 15) Do we keep score today with anyone we have a relationship with, family, co-worker, etc…
   2. Illustration — For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are (eris) contentions (erithia - factions) among you. (1 Corinthians 1:11). Can you imagine when Paul brought this to light through this epistle that the congregation was probably in some respects acting like a bunch of adolescents hanging out with there friends and thinking they were with the best leader at this point and possibly complaining that the household of Chloe told on them. Do we act this way in the church today?
   3. Application — We know of situations like this and we can identify, either through our own life experiences, or others, that we as humans, have a tendency to do it our own way and it always gets us in trouble, individually, or in a group we are a part of at the time. 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:13)
2. Is maintaining unity keeping a book of resentment?
   1. Exposition — In 1 Corinthians 3:3 Paul tells the Corinthians, “for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? So here we have spiritually immature men who still are allowing themselves to be distracted by fleshly desires. How many of us still have or struggle with fleshly desires?
   2. Illustration — The marks of the spiritually immature, (Paul again reminds them here because he fed them with milk when they were babes in Christ, 1 Corinthians 3:1-4), are still carnal, they are immature, and these are the traits of the spiritually immature of the Corinthian church is this situation: 1. Baby-like - Babies are self-centered, only concerned about their own needs being met. They can only handle a limited diet, milk, and possess limited understanding. 2. Bitterness - Envious people are bitter. They live for attention and get upset when outdone or upstaged. 3. Battling - There are some people who just seem to want to fight or argue all the time. They are constantly squabbling or in discord. 4 Brokenness - Carnal people are always stirring the pot by choosing sides and fanning the flames. 5 Barrenness - Fleshly people bear no fruit. What else needs to be said. Are we bearing fruit?
   3. Application - Where these divisions and factions are existing, these are where all the problems of the spiritually immature exist and there is no room for spiritual growth and eventually the church dies unless a change takes place because of a spiritual remedy. Are we identifying our spiritual short-comings and finding the cure or solution to the problem so we can be part of the edification of the body of Christ? Pleasing to God?
3. A More Excellent Way for Maintaining Unity! Biblical Love.
   1. Exposition — Paul has pointed out all of the Corinthian church’s short comings and addressed both doctrine and practical application now starting at the end of 1 Corinthians 12:31 where he states “But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet, I show you a more excellent way.” We have stated the qualities of the spiritually immature above so what are the qualities of the spiritually mature? How would they have adjusted to the qualities above: 1. Baby-like - Mature people meet the needs of others and grow in spiritual diet (move from milk to meat) and understanding. 2. Bitterness - A mature Christian serves the Lord without concern for personal recognition. 3. Battling - Christians are peacemakers and committed to unity. 4. Brokenness - Christians should strive for or be committed to reconciliation. 5. Barrenness - Those who truly are spiritual bear fruit time and time again even in tough situations. Are we solving our individual as well as congregation issues to the edification of the body of Christ?
   2. Illustration — I Corinthians 13 The Holy Spirit tells us through Paul about Biblical Love which is Godly love. The example that Christ is to us and how we need to imitate Him daily is where Paul takes them in their understanding to remind them what it looks like to serve in the church of Jesus Christ. This is the “more excellent way”, the perfectness of God’s Love as described in chapter 13. Paul’s timely description tells the Corinthians this is how you imitate Christ as a member of the Lord’s body and this is what will unify you as a church and edify the body of Christ at the same time. Functioning as one body, one mind, one Spirit to the glorification of God through Christ Jesus. Are we putting in the time in study to constantly remind us of where we need to be in our servitude with Christ?
   3. Application — So when the Corinthian church practices the qualities of Biblical love, agape love, the Godly love and Christ-like love we are told about in chapter 13, the unity will grow strong with the edification of the body of Christ. Encouragement, and brotherly love will be prevalent and the division and factions will die. The leadership in todays church has to step up and make the tough decisions in love and the congregation has to support these leaders in love as long as they’re making scriptural decisions. And we need to get rid of that tally sheet mentality. Not only in the body of Christ but it needs to start at home by studying the word.

Conclusion

1. If we will adopt and practice agape love as Christ exemplified for us while he was on earth and still does through the living words of God our Father through the Holy Spirit, then as Paul told us, we will be recognizable as members of the Lords body and not blend in with the “Corinthians of our day and age” unrecognizable to Christ! What do we want to hear? “Welcome my good and faithful servant” and be unified in heaven for eternity or “Depart from me you worker of iniquity, I never knew you.”