

SERMONSECOND
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH

460 East Main Street

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Care For One Another (Part 2)

Ephesians 4:1-6, 25-32

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Today is the second in a three part series looking in-depth at the phrase that appears in 542 verses in Scripture. The phrase is “one another.” Our 2019 Stewardship Campaign is Caring For One Another.

So how do we care for one another? Last week we looked at Jesus’ command to “love one another.” The kind of love that Jesus commands us to love is sacrificing, purifying, caring, and unifying love. Today we want to look more closely at “live in harmony with one another.” Different translations may show it as “be kind to one another” or “be accepting to one another.” But they all essentially mean “live in harmony with one another.” By living in harmony with one another, we are caring for one another.

Paul rephrases it by telling the church in Ephesus to “live in a way that is worthy of the calling.”

Paul refers to himself as a “prisoner in the Lord.” Recall that he had been taken captive by Jesus and no longer was in control of his own life. He no longer had any choice. Jesus’ desire was a demand to Paul. Paul was “all in” . . . he had “total commitment.”

I was speaking with a colleague recently who asked something like this. “How do we get the people to be committed?”

It is a question that I have heard before and one that I have asked myself many times. There is so much to do in any family and this is especially true in the church family—yet instead of working together we often—to avoid conflict—fail to work at all.

Yes, there is conflict in the family . . .

There was certainly conflict in the family in which I grew up.

I readily admit that I wasn’t the best brother to my two sisters. My goal each day, as a young boy, and as a teenager, was to make my sisters cry. Once I had accomplished the task, I was off on my merry little way to some other activity. There was not much harmony, and admittedly, I was the cause of much of the disharmony in the household. Living in a family isn’t always easy—there are times we do not get along so well.

Even in church there are moments of anger and frustration. However, it's important to remember that what holds us together is mightier than what pulls us apart. Maybe we need to be reminded about whose calling it is and that we belong to God's family—all of us.

Remember Willie Stargell, home run hitting first baseman for the Pittsburgh Pirates. He still holds a number of Pirates slugging records, he is remembered most for the heart he brought to the game. "I would have played for free," he once remarked. "After all, the umpire says 'play ball,' not 'work ball.' It was never a job to me."

It was Stargell who encouraged the 1979 Pirates to use Sister Sledge's "We Are Family" as a theme for the team's togetherness. "We were products of different races, different income brackets," he said of his fellow World Series champions, "but in the clubhouse and on the field, we were one."

He and his team made a long and productive (and ultimately successful) journey — and they made it together. (Illustration is from homileticsonline.com)

The word *commitment* is used much, but lived up to very little in our society. Commitment is an agreement or a pledge to do something in the future. It can be built slowly and unfortunately can be destroyed very quickly.

Let me say this and let me encourage you to hear this and burn it into your minds. What we enjoy today at 2Pres—the unity and oneness of purpose—if ever shattered by a family fight will be lost and the effects will last for years. Sometimes the consequences go on for decades.

Let us . . . live in harmony with one another . . . in a way that is worthy of the calling.

How do we go about living in harmony with one another (caring for one another)?

First, we must accept one another in love with all humility and gentleness, along with patience.

Randy Frazee wrote a book entitled, *The Connecting Church*. He has a son who was born without a left hand. One day in Sunday School the teacher was talking with the children about the church. To illustrate her point she folded her hands together and said, "Here's the church, here's the steeple; open the doors and see all the people."

She asked the class to do it along with her—obviously not thinking about Frazee's son's inability to pull this exercise off. Then it dawned on her that the boy would not be able to join in.

Before she could do anything about it, the little boy next to Frazee's son, a friend of his from the time they were babies, reached out his left hand and said, "Let's do it together." The two boys proceeded to join their hands together to make the church and steeple.

Frazee says, "This hand exercise should never be done again by an individual because the church is not a collection of individuals, but the one body of Christ."

Look at others more than you look at yourself. Look around you right now. See the people, God loves them and so should you.

Secondly, in order to live in harmony with one another, Paul says we are called to maintain the unity of the Spirit. Easier said than done!

By nature, we are incompatible and competitive. A few years ago, Leslie and I were talking and she said that “men never grow up.” I took offense to that. Then about a week later, (this was when LSU baseball team was playing in the College Baseball Regional Tournament) I told her about a fight that had broken out between LSU and ULL. When I finished I said, “Isn’t that cool?” Her reply was, “See, I told you, men never grow up!”

Paul says, “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be arrogant, but associate with humble people. Do not think that you are wiser than you really are. Do not pay anyone back evil for evil, but focus your thoughts on what is right in the sight of all people. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live in peace with all people.”

Paul even gives us a list of what unites us in order that we may live in harmony with one another. *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all* (v. 4-6). This list could be called God’s super glue.

One body . . . One Spirit . . . One hope of your calling . . . One Lord . . . One faith . . . One baptism . . . One God and Father of all.

Remember, what holds us together is mightier than what pulls us apart.

A bus tour in Rome that was led by a guide who spoke English. Their first stop was a basilica in a piazza that was surrounded by several lanes of relentless traffic. After they were all safely dropped off, the group climbed the steps for a quick tour of the church. Then they spread out to board the bus, which was parked across the street from the church. The frantic guide shouted for the group to stay together. He hollered out to them, “You cross one by one, they hit you one by one. But if you cross together, they think you will hurt the car!” There is always much to be said for unity, particularly unity of the Spirit.

--Barbara Burkhoff, *Grapes of Wrath or Grace*, CSS Publishing, Lima, Ohio.

As a family, as the family of God, our calling in essence, is to help people “find their way home.” In other words, we are building a house for God’s people. I want to suggest to you today there are three rooms in God’s house.

First, there’s the Family Room. The family room is the most comfortable room in the house. It’s where you feel right at home. This sanctuary is the “family room” of God’s house. We gather as God’s family to celebrate our oneness every Sunday. This is where we should feel most comfortable, where we should feel we most belong.

Then there’s the Dining Room. The dining room is where we learn and grow in the ways of God. This is the room in which we get fed—everything from milk to steak. There is fellowship and sharing and growing and learning in the dining room.

Finally, there’s the Kitchen. The kitchen is where most people gravitate too. The kitchen is where you serve God by serving others.

This is what we're all about, as we live in harmony with one another.

This is a story that you probably remember, but it illustrates my point. During a Special Olympics that was held in Seattle, nine runners, all physically or mentally challenged, lined up at the starting line for the 100 yard dash. At the sound of the starting gun, they all started out with the eagerness and joy to run the race to the finish and win.

All started out well with the exception of one boy who stumbled. He flipped a couple of times and began to cry. The other 8 runners heard the boy cry. They slowed down and paused. Then they all turned and went back—every one of them. One girl with Downs Syndrome bent down and kissed the boy and said, “That will make it better.” Then all 9 of them linked arms and walked together to the finish line. Everyone in the stadium stood, and the cheering went for 10 solid minutes.

Why did the runners finish like this? Because they all had the same heart. They knew that the goal was to win, but that the greater goal was to cross the finish line and it was better to do it together, than to leave one behind, hurt, crying and alone.

What holds us together is mightier than what pulls us apart.

Live in harmony with one another . . . care for one another.

Sources:

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The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN 1991.

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The message is from sermons that I preached over the years that I have been in the pastorate. I have compiled them from the notes I made before they were preached. I do not know where I found some of the material contained here. I may have borrowed it, as a whole or in part, from others. I simply do not remember. If this is the case, I apologize right now, and that our combined efforts will glorify God.