

"Be at Peace Among Yourselves"

Call to Worship: Psalm 133

1st Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-6

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

Hymn #286- *We Gather Together*

Hymn #270- *The Church's One Foundation*

Hymn #285- *Blest Be the Tie that Binds*

Introduction:

Having worked through Paul's main purpose for writing this letter to the Thessalonians, last time, we had come upon a list of various additional exhortations that Paul had strapped onto this letter. And the first exhortation addressed the need to recognize and esteem the elders of the church very highly, for their works sake.

This morning, we hit the pause button at a second essential exhortation that Paul then gives, which can be very easy to pass over (with little reflection), if we are not careful. Paul inserts this little phrase, "Be at peace among yourselves," immediately following the first exhortation and just before jumping into another one.

More than likely, this phrase does find some relationship to the first exhortation, because it is necessary to have a general mindset that seeks to maintain peace for the greater glory of Christ, which will help, in turn, motivate the brethren to esteem their leaders highly, who are striving to maintain a unified and advancing church. And so, the connection and attachment to the first exhortation makes complete sense. However, Paul goes above and beyond with this statement, not simply calling for peace with the elders/shepherds of the church, but for peace with all in the body. In other words, he capitalizes on his first exhortation, by extending the boundaries and calling for a larger, universal, more general peace with all of the brethren.

The importance of this exhortation, compels us to take the time this morning, to open it up further, unto our further edification and the greater glory of Christ.

I. The Unity/Peace Connection

In John 1:18, John states something absolutely profound, which would have blown the mind of the first century Christian: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him."

Consider what John is saying here for a moment. In all of history, no single human being has ever seen God, in the fullness of who He is. God has indeed revealed aspects of His glory to those of old. He has taken on lesser forms or revealed His glory in various ways, but no one has ever ultimately seen God, period! However, at the time of Christ's incarnation, something profound and revolutionary has happened! In His own Person, and in the perfection of His being, Christ has revealed God, indeed, the fullness of the Godhead, in Himself. He has exegeted, declared and expounded God to mankind, in His own Person, to the fullest extent that God could reveal Himself to finite human beings! In His own Person, Jesus has made the One, true and living God, known! The author of Hebrews states something completely unique to Christ, when he calls Him the *express* (perfect, exact) image of God. Were you to somehow press God into a human mold, and pour up a model of that exact mold, you would get Christ, not in the physical sense (God is Spirit), but in every virtuous aspect of His eternal being! In His Person, Christ revealed God in His perfect character and will to the world! And this world full of darkness must see Christ (the Light of the world), to see God, so that it might be saved.

But our Savior has since ascended to glory, has He not? And so, how is the world to see Christ, and to see God, if Christ is no longer present in the flesh? It is through the church, the pillar and ground of God's truth, that Christ is revealed! Christ is present, no longer in the body, but in His temple, the church. Now, listen to John again, only this time, in 1 John 4:12: "No one has seen God at anytime." Clearly, John is seeking to make a connection with what we have just read in John 1:18. Nowhere else will you find such exact language, followed by an answer to that reality. Only here, listen to what John says this time: "No one has seen God at anytime. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

Consider again, how profound this statement is, brethren. The second statement is an answer to the first. It is like a, "However," statement. No one has seen God at anytime. However, when we love one another, God's presence abides in us. He reveals Himself to the world through us. His love is perfected in us. We reveal God to the world; we reveal Christ to the world; we are lights, even as Christ is *The Light*, and the world of darkness sees a revelation of God, which it so desperately needs to see, in us, when we love one another! The glory of God, which was once revealed in the physical temple, by smoke and clouds and bright glory, is

now better revealed in the church (the New Covenant Temple of God) by her mutual love for one another! That is how the presence of Christ, and the authenticating power of the Word, is revealed! You see, the love and the unity of the church is that essential, because it manifests the real presence of Christ to a lost, fallen, godless world! Is it any wonder then, that the Lord Jesus Christ, in His High Priestly prayer in John 17, pleads not about the horrible suffering that He is about to face, but rather, that His disciples (of all ages), would be "one," even as He and the Father were one...*"so that the world may know that You sent Me!?"*

Hence, the most critical motivation for the love of the brethren, which is repeated and emphasized numerous times all throughout Scripture, is that, that love is the evidence of the power and presence of Christ to the world! Everyone wants signs and wonders, because they think that such displays of power are what will reveal God to the world. John says, "No, even that will not last or work. No one has seen God at anytime. If you love one another, He abides in you, and His love (His divine, eternal, perfect love) is perfected in you.

And that love will only be found where there is a unity and oneness of purpose; where all of Christ's sheep have laid aside their own interests and have embraced the interests of their glorious King Jesus; taking up the cross with Him, denying themselves daily and following Him. When that love is fostered in a unity of purpose and heart, the presence of Christ bursts forth and the church grows! And lost souls are converted and added to the church. Am I wrong to say this? Listen to these verses:

1) When we consider the early church in Acts, what was the context, within which, God blessed and grew the church? "Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:44-47). When you read through the Book of Acts (19+ chapters of which, we have worked through in Sunday School), you will find that the context within which the Lord blessed His church and manifested His presence, was a context of "one accordness," and "single mindedness," and "love," and unity of purpose and heart.

2) Philippians 2:1-4: "Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill 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." [Goes on to say to "have the mind of Christ..."]

3) Colossians 3:12-15: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

[We can go on and consider the great danger of the sectarian spirit, which was developing at Corinth-- "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos or Cephas...etc," and the lack of consideration of others, while taking the Lord's Supper...etc. Why so much concern about these kinds of things? Because they threatened the Christ-revealing unity, revealed by the love of the brethren!]

Now, brethren, where does "Peace," come into all of this? Why have I spent all of this time, laying a foundation of the importance of love and unity, when we are dealing with a text that simply says, "Be at peace among yourselves?" Is there any connection between unity and peace? Of course, there is...a very significant connection. You see, unity is essential, but unity is a thing that must be preserved. Unity does not come once and then just maintain itself the whole way home. It is not like justification, in that sense. Unity is something that must continually, carefully, consciously be preserved. Because unity can sour. Unity is the type of thing that can look great one moment and then completely fall apart the next. It must be maintained and preserved. And the place of that preservation, is in the bond of peace. Peace is the only preserving agent, which can protect unity. Hear again, the Apostle Paul's words from Ephesians 4:1-4:

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called (and such a glorious calling it is-- see chapters 1-3!) with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring 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."

You see, Paul here tells us that we must take pains; pains, which are contradictory to our natural fleshly inclinations (pains of "lowliness, gentleness, long suffering, bearing with one another in love") endeavoring/striving to preserve our Christ revealing unity, in the bond of peace. And so, when the rubber meets the road, with a constant eye fixed on preserving the precious unity of the body, for the glory of Christ, we must continually ask ourselves, "Am I doing everything on my part to maintain the peace of the church, so that our Christ revealing love and unity are not hindered? Am I willing to sacrifice much, to suffer much (long suffering), to bear with much, in this body, for the greater cause of securing peace and unity? [An atmosphere that deals lovingly and biblically and tenderly with conflict, putting out every spark of contention and threat of schism/division]

And so, when the Apostle says (with so few words) in our main text in 1 Thessalonians 5, "Brethren, be at peace among yourselves," he has this weighty package in mind the whole way through. There is a lot at stake here, isn't there? And there is no room for "*my* prerogatives," amongst a church full of blood bought, redeemed sinners, who owe everything, and infinitely more than they could ever pay, to Christ. When Paul says to, "Walk worthy of your calling," in Ephesians 4:1, he is saying, "You can never pay it back, but do all you can to extend the heart and hand of gratefulness to Christ by keeping His commandments, the greatest of which (next to loving God), is to lay down your lives even, for one another!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having dug deep, to at least get a sense of our main text for this morning, brethren, let us then conclude our time by applying what we have gone over:

Who in this assembly can you not love and serve, in the light of all that we have gone over? How difficult is it really, to put up with "so and so," and to serve alongside of (or with) "so and so," in the light of this big picture? Who irks you the most among the brethren? Who is the

distant type A to your type B personality or vice versa? What level of sacrifice are you making by putting up with anyone among the brethren?

Can you stand there at the foot of the cross and dare look down upon any who are here in your midst? Can you toss aside the glorious call to unity, which exalts the power and presence of Christ, because "so and so" is just too much of a clash and a contradiction with your personality? Some say, "Well, you can *love* "so and so," but you don't have to *like* him." That is the biggest load of worldly, psychobabble hogwash in all of existence. And it makes the glory and power of the cross seem so cheap and powerless. You mean that Christ's love for you can't bring you to like certain individuals? Brethren, the love of Christ ought to extend our arms outward till we can clap our hands behind our backs, only to bring them forward, around even the so-called "chief of sinners."

Be at peace; pursue peace among yourselves. Husbands and wives, parents and children, fellow brother or sister in the body of Christ, let that peace (the peace of Christ), unto the preservation of such a volatile and fragile unity, rule in your hearts. This is not about us. We are secondary beneficiaries to a much greater cause. This is about Christ, our Creator and Savior, and His glory! One of the reasons that we exhort you not to take the Lord's Supper, if there is any unresolved conflict between you and another brother/sister in Christ, which you are unwilling to resolve, is because of our desire to protect and preserve this unity from hypocrisy and defilement, when we take communion together.

Brethren, in the grand scope of all that matters, there is a much bigger picture than you or I, that is in play here. And God, for the glory of His great Name, and to manifest His glorious reality and Gospel power, has ordained to build and prosper His church, and to reveal His Son by this church, through a redeemed and yet imperfect, naturally clashing group of personalities, who through the shed blood of Christ, must and ought to learn to love and serve one another! Let's live in that light, laying hold of the same purposes in Christ with both hands, of one accord, of one mind...to God be the glory!

Amen!!!

The Lord's Supper!