

Be united in thought with other believers

A sermon preached at Poplar Baptist Church,
12th May 2019

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (Romans 12.16)

Introduction

It should never happen, but sadly we hear sometimes of terrible arguments breaking out between Christians, sometimes between Christians who are members of the same church. Such disputes bring the cause of Christ into disrepute and lead to unbelievers laughing at the Gospel. Arguments like this can cause deep distress to believers, leaving them scarred for life.

Many of these arguments would be not happen if the verse that we are thinking about today were followed. It is really important that we hear what God has to say to us through his Word, so that we might live as he would have us to live.

There are three things that this verse tells us to do:

1. We are to be united in thought with our fellow believers
2. We are to be humble in the way in which we relate with each other
3. We are not to be wise in our own eyes.

Today we are going to think about the first of these. I hope to come back to the other two on another occasion.

1. We are to be united in thought with each other

The apostle says, according to our translation, "Live in harmony with one another." The literal translation is "have the same....towards each other". The apostle does not actually say what is the same thing that the believers should have, but I think we can take it that he is saying that we should have a common view of things. The same way of thinking should dominate our minds, so that there is a fundamental unity that we have amongst us.

This is something which is frequently urged in the Scriptures. In his first letter to the Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 10, the apostle says, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought."

In Philippians chapter 2 and verse 2, the apostle similarly writes, "Make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

Of course there are inevitably going to be some differences of opinion among believers. This is clear from chapters 14 and 15 of this letter, where the apostle says how differences of view over secondary matters are to be handled. But even when there are differences of view, there is to an over-arching unity of thinking and of purpose between believers. How can this be achieved?

Let me mention four things which will, I suggest, help this unity of mind and purpose to be maintained.

1) We should avoid petty factionalism

So often divisions come about in church life because believers divide themselves into factions based upon personalities. This is what happened in Corinth. The apostle said to the believers in Corinth, as recorded in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 11 to 13,

My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptised into the name of Paul?

The believers had formed different groups based upon different personalities. They were giving to human beings a status that really

only belongs to Christ. We must always remember that any pastor or teacher, however loved and respected he may be, is only a servant of Christ. It is Christ who saves, not any human being. If we divide into different groups on the basis of human personalities, then we are thinking in a carnal and sinful way. The apostle says in chapter 3 and verses 1 to 7 of the same letter,

Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly [or carnal, fleshly] — mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe — as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

2) We should sort out personal grievances in a Biblical way

Very often in church life when you look under the surface, what appears to be a division over doctrine actually boils down to a personal difference which is being presented as a doctrinal issue. Person A is offended with person B over something that person B did to him, for example having been rude to him. However, rather than talking directly with person B about what his issue is, person A divides off from person B and finds fault with him over some other issue.

The attitude that we should have towards one another should be one of bearing with each other, and forgiving each other for offences given, even before the other person asks to be forgiven. We should be ready to overlook offences. The apostle Paul writes in Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 and 13, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

You might feel as though a way in which a fellow believer has offended against you is so serious that you just cannot ignore it. There are clear guidelines given in Scripture for dealing with such matters. If you believe that someone has sinned against you, you should go and speak

directly with that person about the wrong that you think he has done. Jesus said, as recorded in Matthew chapter 18 verse 15, "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over." Jesus goes on to say in the next verse that if the person who has wronged you maintains his innocence, but you believe that he has done wrong, you should take two others with you to talk with the person, with the aim of resolving the matter. "If he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'" In the next verse, Jesus says that if the person still will not listen to you, then you should bring the matter to the church, for the church to adjudicate. If the church decides in your favour, and the person does not listen to the whole church, then he should be treated like an unbeliever. "If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." So God has provided a mechanism for dealing with matters where you believe that you have been wrongly treated by another believer. If, instead of doing this, you say to yourself, unilaterally, "I am not going to relate in a meaningful way with this believer any more" then you are going directly against what Jesus told you to do.

If, at any point in such a process of confrontation, your brother admits that he has done wrong, then you should forgive him. Jesus said, as recorded in Luke chapter 17 verses 3 and 4, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him."

So we should deal with personal offences in a godly and appropriate way, and should not allow them to cause division in the church.

3) We should keep our focus on the big truths of the Gospel

When quarrels come into church life, it is almost always because believers have lost sight of the great truths of the Gospel. If only we kept uppermost in our minds that we are hell-deserving sinners, who have been saved only by the grace of God, we would not be able to have any serious quarrels with other believers. We need to focus on the big matters of the faith, and keep these things constantly before our minds. If we do this we will see in their proper perspective other matters over which we may disagree.

What truths am I talking about? Truths like,

- The perfection and completeness of the Word of God
- The majesty of perfection of God
- The glory and divinity of Christ
- Our own utter sinfulness
- That Christ died as our substitute
- That we are saved only by grace, through faith, not by works
- That we are called to live a holy life
- That we have a glorious hope.

If these truths are strong in our minds, then we will not go chasing after finer points of doctrine and practice, and divide off from other believers over less important matters. We may indeed have differences of opinion about various matters, even matters which are important, but, next to the great and glorious truths of the Gospel, these other matters will seem relatively unimportant, and will not disturb the fundamental unity that we have.

4) We should grow to maturity in our understanding

Thanks be to God, there is such a thing as truth about spiritual matters, and this truth is revealed in the Scriptures. Therefore, as we grow in our understanding of the Scriptures, we will not only understand the truth more, but we will also grow closer together.

Before we were converted, we were in darkness. We did not know the truth. But then, for those of us who are Christians, our eyes were opened. We were born again. We were brought into the knowledge of the truth.

Having come to a knowledge of the truth, we then need to grow up to maturity in our understanding. As we grow to maturity, so we will also grow closer to each other. As you come nearer to the truth, and as I come nearer to the truth, so we come closer to each other.

The apostle Paul speaks about this in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 to 13, where he says,

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's

people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

So, let us take every opportunity to grow in our understanding of the truth. Let us come to the meetings on Sunday afternoons. Let us gather together at the midweek Bible studies. Let us read the Bible on our own. Let us read good Christian books. Let us listen to recordings of sermons. As we do these things, we will grow to maturity in our understanding, and so we will more and more fulfil this command that we should think the same thoughts.

Conclusion

What we have talked about today is a very important aspect of Christian discipleship. God is calling us to be likeminded with our fellow believers, especially with those with whom we are in immediate fellowship, as part of the same congregation. This is not an “optional extra” for our Christian lives. It is to be a fundamental aspect of our walk with God.

It is only possible for us to do this if we are truly the Lord's. If you do not belong to Christ, then your thinking is going to be shaped by the devil. There will be no unity between you and other believers. So, as I close, I must ask you this question: are you truly saved? Have you come to Christ for salvation? If you are in any doubt at all, come to Christ and ask him to save you.

This booklet contains the edited notes of a sermon which was preached by Henry Dixon. A recording of the actual sermon that was preached may be found at

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