

Dwelling in Unity

I can still remember what it was like to take our family on vacation, only to have the kids in the backseat mar the joy of it all by their bickering and complaining. Who doesn't remember the disruptive effects of "Dad, she touched me!" or "Mom, he won't give me a turn!"

If you've had that kind of experience, you can imagine how God feels when His children quarrel and complain. Getting along is important to God. Jesus prayed that we would "be one" so that the world would believe He came from the Father (John 17:20-21). And to disciples who were prone to quarreling, He commanded that they love and serve one another (13:34-35; Matt. 20:20-28). It should also be noted that among the seven things God hates, He includes "one who sows discord among brethren" (Prov. 6:19).

So I'm not surprised that the psalmist tells us that when brothers dwell in unity, it's like "the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments" (Psalm 133:1-2). In ancient times, the oil of anointing was full of fragrant spices that graced the environment wherever the anointed one went. May the unity that comes from our love and service to one another fragrantly grace our families, churches, and friendships. Christians who get along with each other spread the sweet aroma of Jesus.

Work Makes You Free

The name of a pretty Bavarian town in Germany shares the name of a place of horror—Dachau. A museum on the grounds of this infamous Nazi concentration camp attracts many World War II history buffs.

As you look around, it would be hard to miss the misleading words welded to an iron gate: Arbeit Macht Frei. This phrase—Work Makes You Free—was just a cruel lie to give false hope to those who entered this place of death.

Many people today have false hope that they can earn a place in heaven by working at by doing good things. Some have deluded themselves into thinking that if their good deeds outweigh their bad ones, they will earn a place in heaven. God's standard of perfection, however, requires a totally sinless life. There's no way any of us can ever be "good enough." It is only through the sacrifice of the sinless Savior that we are made righteous. God made Jesus "who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2Cor. 5:21). Eternal life is given because of God's grace; our good works are a response to His grace (Eph. 2:8-10). Don't let Satan trick you by giving you false hope that your good works alone will save you. It is also through Jesus' work on the cross that you can have real freedom.

Life for Life

"If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life..." (Ex. 21:22-23)

A professor at the UCLA Medical School asked his students this question: "Here is the family history: The father has syphilis. The mother has TB. They already have had four children. The first is blind. The second has died. The third is deaf. The fourth has TB. The mother is pregnant. The parents are willing to have an abortion if you decide they should. What do you think?"

Most of the students decided on abortion. "Congratulations," said the professor. "You have just murdered Beethoven!" (From Terence Patterson) No one should put himself in the place of God and decide that a certain child should or should not live.

A Prisoner of Sin

A 2008 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime said, "At any given time there are more than 10 million people imprisoned worldwide." Since some prisoners are being released while new ones are being sentenced every day, there are more than 30 million total prisoners worldwide each year. Statistics like these have caused many people to work for prison reform and a reexamination of sentencing laws.

From a spiritual perspective, the Bible offers an even more staggering statistic: "The Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin" (Gal. 3:22). In what is sometimes considered a difficult passage to understand, Paul says that although the Old Testament law could not impart life (v.21), it was an effective teacher in showing us that we need a Savior who can give life (v.24). The bad news is that "the Scripture has confined all under sin," and the good news is "that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (v.22). When we give our lives to Christ, who has fulfilled the requirements of the law, we are no longer imprisoned by sin. Instead, we enter a fellowship of people from every nationality and social status. In Christ, we are free indeed! Deliverance from sin is the greatest of all freedoms.

Little is Much

Just the other day someone said of a friend, "This man is destined for a great ministry," by which he meant he was headed for the big time, a large church with a big budget. It made me wonder: Why do we think that God's call is necessarily upwardly mobile? Why wouldn't He send His best workers to labor for a lifetime in some small place? Aren't there people in obscure places who need to be evangelized and taught? God is not willing that any perish.

Jesus cared about the individual as well as the masses. He taught large crowds if they appeared, but it never bothered Him that His audience grew smaller every day. Many left Him, John said (John 6:66), a fickle attrition that would have thrown most into high panic. Yet Jesus pressed on with those the Father gave Him.

We live in a culture where bigger is better, where size is the measure of success. It takes a strong person to resist that trend, especially if he or she is laboring in a small place. But size is nothing; substance is everything. Whether you're working with a small church or leading a small Bible study, serve them with all your heart. Pray, love, teach by word and example. Your little place is not a steppingstone to greatness. It is greatness. Little is much when God is in it.

A Moments Wisdom

--A wise man changes his mind, a fool never will.

--The main dangers in this life are the people who want to change everything or nothing.

--Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

--Everybody wants to do something to help, but nobody wants to be the first.

--Any change, even a change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.

--Consider how hard it is to change yourself and you'll understand why you have so much difficulty in trying to change others.