

Real Unity, Real Hope

The greatest desire of Jesus was for the unity of His followers. This is what He prayed for in His Great Prayer of John 17: "Father, that they may be one as You and I are one".

Sin brought division, blame shifting, fear and hiddenness. There was an animosity that fig leaves could not hide.

To this day our fallen natures have been inadequate in healing this divisiveness. Only the birthing of the new humanity through the Good News of Jesus has had any truly significant effect in restoring the harmony of relationships God intended for mankind from the get-go.

What prevents Unity?

Superficiality is a common blockage. It's the false claim of "Peace! Peace!" where there is no peace. It is the pretended healing of the deep wounds of people.

So, let's get real!!

Preterence is another barrier. It's the covering up of the guilt and shame of past failures in the hope that if they are not acknowledged they will disappear. It's the idea that the fig leaves of our contrived masks will cause what is not immediately apparent to lose its effect and become discounted.

So, let's get honest!

Judgementalism and blame shifting is another toxin preventing unity. The attempt to deflect responsibility onto another is a destructive way of self-defensiveness. In military parlance, the saying is that "attack is the best form of defence".

So, let's be welcoming!

Independence (and its accompanying arrogance) is a very common blockage of unity. This is the sense of self sufficiency, often born of affluence, which results in an aversion to the risks of unity. Of course, the risks of independence are more toxic.

In terms of church, the affluence measured by numbers, finance, ministries, and facilities, can, sadly, often cause such aversion to the call for unity. It needn't, but it does.

So, let's be humble!

Prejudice is a particular problem for unity. It leans into the confusion that unity requires uniformity, that certain types or classifications are not to be embraced in trust. In fact, the insistence on racial categories perpetuates the divisiveness of apartheid. Variety is an enrichment and a cause for celebration not for fear. In the New Humanity that Jesus births in and among us, our differences are a gift not a threat.

So, let's celebrate diversity!

Carelessness about the sufferings of others hinders the unity that would make us a people of Hope in a deeply hurting world. Often in the earthly ministry of Jesus it is recorded that He was "moved with compassion". Paul also urges the welcoming of the compassion that leads to a unity that is expressed in genuine care.

So, let's be compassionate!

Laziness is another blockage to authentic unity. Persistent diligence in maintaining the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace requires the pursuit of conflict resolution. It also calls for crucial conversations and loving confrontations. We get what we allow. Passivity invites compromise. All that it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

So, let's talk and act!!

Selfishness is an enemy to unity. It opposes loving service of others. It looks only for what advances the self rather than the other. It can be found in individuals or groups of people and in political agendas. Wherever it is found, someone suffers. Jesus taught the supreme lesson to combat this social cancer.

So, let's share!

Isolation too hinders healthy unity. Paul taught that every member of the body is necessary. Disdain and rejection are a denial of true humanity. We grow and do life better when iron can sharpen iron.

So, let's connect!

Integrity is essential for real unity. Walking in the light invites true fellowship which in turn opens us up to grow, change, be healed. It won't settle for sweeping things under the carpet. It is a key toward integration. The refusal to integrate is often a sign of insecurity, of the absence of integrity.

So, let's follow Jesus!!

He is the Hope of the world!!

Dr Dave Pedersen: National Director Vineyard Churches SA.