



DEAN WELCH – TEACHER

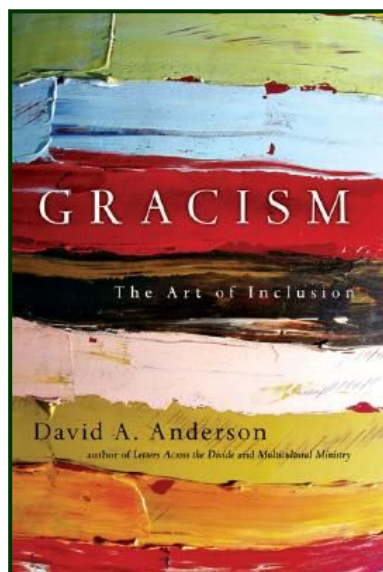


(“I WILL STAND WITH YOU”)

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

AUGUST 16, 2009


LESSON #5 FROM THE **MASTERWORK** SERIES STUDY OF:





NO DIVISION

("I WILL STAND WITH YOU")

 In one *Peanuts* comic strip, Lucy demanded that Linus change the channel on the TV, threatening him with her fist if he didn't comply. "What makes you think you can walk in here and take over?" asks Linus. "These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing—but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold." "Which channel would you like?" asks Linus. Turning away he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?" That is not a picture of unity, is it?

The story is told of a man who was shipwrecked and lived most of his adult life alone on an obscure island on which no other human being had ever set foot. After many years of isolation, a ship came his way and a rescue party was sent ashore. He welcomed them, of course, then proceeded to show them around. Pointing to a small log cabin, he said, "This is my house. I built it with my own two hands." Then he showed them a second building. "This is my Church," he said. "I built it with my own two hands." Then he showed them a third building, saying, "This is the Church I used to go to." How can one man divide a church?

There's an old story I heard that says that in the 1890s there was a small Baptist church in Mayfield County, Kentucky that encountered a problem. The church had two deacons who were constantly arguing and bickering over some issue or the other. One of them put up a small wooden peg on the back wall so the pastor could hang up his hat. When the other deacon discovered the peg, he was outraged. "How dare you put a peg in the wall without first consulting me!" The people in the church took sides and the congregation eventually split. It's said that even today the residents of Mayfield County still refer to the two churches as Peg Baptist Church and Anti-Peg Baptist Church.

By now you certainly know that this morning we're talking about UNITY—or as the symbol on the board indicates, no division—as

we wrap up Week Five of David Anderson's study from his book, *Gracism*. Open your Bible to our foundational scripture verses in **1 CORINTHIANS 12: 24-25 (NIV)** and follow along: "...But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be **NO DIVISION** in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

As we've talked about each week in this study, 1 Corinthians 12 deals with spiritual gifts, while David Anderson has taken the principles to remind us that we, as members of the body of Christ, are to extend God's grace to others—especially those that don't receive a lot in life because of their race, culture or class. However, if you look at the various commentaries about these verses from 1 Corinthians 12, you'll see that the church at Corinth was having problems and Paul was writing them to bond together as one body—and not go off in different directions because some thought they were better than others. **Verses 14-27** emphasize one major idea: **the body is a picture of both UNITY and DIVERSITY at the same time**. John MacArthur, in his *Commentary*, says: "None should exalt themselves because of the gift given to them, nor should any think themselves less because they receive a gift some view as less significant." Look again at verse **25**, which, according to MacArthur, "introduces the main purpose, namely, no schism in the body," but each should have the same care for one another. Going back to **verse 7**, Paul emphasizes the purpose of the gifts in that verse—"for the profit of all." So, rather than bickering with other Christians and being jealous about other people's positions or gifts, our task is to give of ourselves to others so that if any part of the body is having difficulty or is hurting we seek to minister and heal that part."

Is that a picture of our church? How hard is it to have unity in a diverse group like the church? Why?

I recall a movie a few years back about a real tragedy that almost ripped a small college community apart. Maybe you remember "We Are Marshall." Based on true events, We Are Marshall tells

an inspiring story of how a small town in West Virginia, steeped in the rich tradition of college football, struggled to restore their community after one of the worst disasters in the history of American sports. For this team and this community, Marshall football was more than just a sport, it was a way of life. But on a fateful night in 1970, while traveling back to Huntington after a game in North Carolina, 37 members of Marshall's football team, plus coaching staff and team boosters, were killed in a plane crash. As those left behind tried to cope with the loss of their loved ones, they found hope and strength—and unity—in the leadership of Coach Jack Lengyel, a young coach who was determined to rebuild Marshall's football program and in the process help to heal a community. Here is a clip about the first steps of unity in this community as the school board prepares to end the football program: [\[DOWNLOAD CLIP OR GET DVD MOVIE\]](#)

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Several years ago we did the 40 days of purpose study from Rick Warren's book, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. When our church was struggling a few years back with one group seemingly pitted against another, I remember the powerful words from that study about unity. Let me read you the opening words from Chapter 21, entitled "Protecting Your Church", to refresh your memory about how we as the body of Christ are act:

"It is YOUR job to protect the unity of your church. Unity in the church is so important that the New Testament gives more attention to it than to either HEAVEN or HELL. God deeply desires that we experience oneness and harmony with each other.

Unity is the soul of fellowship. Destroy it, and you rip the heart out of Christ's Body. It is the essence, the CORE, of how God intends for us to experience life together in his church. Our supreme model for unity is the Trinity. the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are completely unified as one. God himself is the highest example of sacrificial love, humble other-centeredness, and perfect harmony."¹

¹ Warren, Rick, *The Purpose-Driven Life*®, 2002, pp 160-161



This principle about unity is not just a good idea—it is set forth in God’s Word so that we won’t misunderstand what we are to do. Let’s look at several verses to reinforce what God is telling us. Turn to **EPHESIANS 4:3 (NIV)** and follow along: *“Make **EVERY EFFORT** to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of **PEACE**.”* Now listen to how the *New Century Version* translates the same verse: *“You are joined together with peace through the Spirit, so make every effort to continue together in this way.”*

Now, turn to **COLOSSIANS 3:14 (TLB)**: *“Most of all, let love guide your life, for then the whole church will **STAY TOGETHER** in perfect harmony.”*

It’s important for each of us here this morning to realize that unity doesn’t begin in examining others—but in examining self. Unity begins not in demanding that others change, but in admitting that we aren’t so perfect ourselves....The answer to arguments? Acceptance. The first step to unity? Acceptance. Not agreement, acceptance. Not unanimity, acceptance. Not negotiation, arbitration, or elaboration. Those might come later but only after the first step, acceptance. This series of lessons by David Anderson challenges us to extend God’s grace to others—no matter what their race, culture or class. That means we have to accept others first. **Why is that so hard for us today?**

Max Lucado in *No Wonder They Call Him Savior* was describing the scene at the foot of the cross where the soldiers were rolling dice for Jesus’ clothes. Casting lots for the possessions of Christ: Heads ducked. Eyes downward. Cross forgotten. The symbolism is striking. It makes me think of us. Can’t you see it? The religious. Those who claim heritage at the cross. Max said he was thinking of all of us. Every believer in the land. The stuffy. The loose. The strict. The simple. Upper church. Lower church. “Spirit-filled.” Millennialists. Evangelical. Political. Mystical. Literal. Cynical. Robes. Collars. Three-piece suits. Born-againers. Ameners. He was thinking of us.



Listen to Max's words: *"We, too, play games at the foot of the cross. We compete for members. We scramble for status. We deal our judgments and condemnations. Competition. Selfishness. Personal gain. It's all there. We don't like what the other did so we take the sandal we won and walk away in a huff. So close to the timbers yet so far from the blood."*²

Listen to these words from Paul to Timothy in **2 TIMOTHY 2: 23-25 (NIV)**: *"²³Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. ²⁴And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. ²⁵Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth,"*

This unity thing is tough! So, how can we love those we find difficult to love, especially when they **AREN'T LIKE US**? As we complete our study about being united in the body of believers, please don't miss the point of Paul in writing the letter. He faced that same question. In fact, that's the reason we have this epistle. The church he began in southern Greece had gone "wacko." When it came to unity, the members of the church in Corinth were out of step with each other. Look with me quickly at what Paul says in **1 CORINTHIANS 1: 10-11 (RSV)**. The apostle has barely placed pen on parchment in Chapter 1 before he writes this: *"I appeal to you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brethren."*

The Greek word for **QUARRELING** also described battles in war. The Corinthian congregation was at war. Why? They couldn't agree on a leader. "One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another says, 'I follow

²Lucado, Max: *Life Lessons from the Inspired Word of God : Book of 1 Corinthians*. Dallas, Tex. : Word Pub., 1997 (Inspirational Bible Study Series), S. 78



Apollos'; another says, 'I follow Peter'; and another says, 'I follow Christ'". The church members had their favorite leaders. The congregation was divided into four groups, drawn and quartered into the Paulites, Apollosites, Peterites, and Jesusites. When it came to unity, the members were out of step.

Early each morning I receive an email with a few words of inspiration from a friend. As I was thinking about our lesson on unity within the body one morning this week, listen to what my friend's email said: *As we have unity with God we must have unity among Christians. Let's build each other up and pray for one another.* And, in support of that reminder, he referenced **JOHN 17:20-23 (NIV)**, which is from Christ's prayer before He went to the cross: ²⁰*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,* ²¹*that all of them may be **ONE**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.* ²²*I have given them the glory that you gave me, that **THEY** may be **ONE** as we are one:* ²³*I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete **UNITY** to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."*

Unity! Mark Twain said that you can tie two cats' tails together and you have a union—but you do not have unity. God places the highest value on unity. There is complete unity in the Godhead. When the people of God come together in unity behind a common vision or goal it is a beautiful and powerful thing. Are we unified today as Christ calls us to be? Unity may be our most obvious missing ingredient.

We need to keep in mind that we are connected as brothers and sisters, and to serve one another, to be one in the spirit and purpose, we care for the problems of each other. We are to extend God's grace and His love to others, even to those of a different race, culture or class no matter what our or their background. Listen to these words from Paul in **PHILIPPIANS 2:1-2 (NLT)**: *¹Is there any encouragement from belonging to*

*Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? ²Then make me truly happy by **AGREEING** wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one **MIND** and **PURPOSE**.*

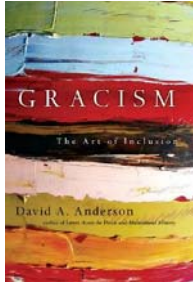
Being much concerned about the rise of denominations in the church, John Wesley tells of a dream he had. In the dream, he was ushered to the gates of Hell. There he asked, "Are there any Presbyterians here?" "Yes!" came the answer. Then he asked, "Are there any Baptists? Any Episcopalians? Any Methodists?" The answer was "Yes!" each time. Much distressed, Wesley was then ushered to the gates of Heaven. There he asked the same question, and the answer was "No!" "No?" To this, Wesley asked, "Who then is inside?" The answer came back, "There are only Christians here."

What would happen (I know this is a crazy thought), but what would happen if all the churches agreed, on a given day, to change their names to simply "church"? What if any reference to any denomination were removed and we were all just Christians? And then when people chose which church to attend, they wouldn't do so by the sign outside ... they'd do so by the hearts of the people inside. And then when people were asked what church they attended, their answer wouldn't be a label but just a location. And then we Christians wouldn't be known for what divides us; instead we'd be known for what unites us—our common Father. Crazy idea? Perhaps. But I think God would like it. It was his to begin with.

God expects unity, not uniformity. We often confuse the two. Fellowship does not mean we think alike. We can go to different churches and worship the same Lord. We can play on different teams and have the same faith. We can work for competing companies and serve the same God and Father. We can fight for warring nations and yet battle a common enemy. We can love the same Lord and vote for opposing political platforms. We can disagree on methodology and agree on Christ. *"We are all one*

body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all" (Ephesians 4:4-6 NLT).

Let's Pray!



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