

Disunity in the world

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Good morning. Well, I wonder if you've ever been to an orchestra. If you've been to an orchestra, put up your hand. I'm interested to see how many people have been to it. Okay, quite a few. So if you've been to an orchestra, you will know what happens before the orchestra.

As you're sitting down and people are finding their seats, and all the instruments in what they call the pit are tuning up, right? And they're all playing their own little tunes and their own notes, and they're not playing together, and it just sounds pretty shocking, right?

All this noise, it's just noise. And then later on, you hear this beautiful harmony, and the contrast is just incredible from what they were playing before. But you know what I mean. All those instruments tuning up, none of them are playing together.

It's just chaos. Each musician just focused on their own instrument and focused on making that instrument sound good, but without context of the others. There's no harmony, no melody.

It's just noise. Well, that, interestingly, is kind of how the Bible describes our world and our society. It's in chaos because there's no harmony.

[1 : 07] There's no unity in what people are doing. Each person is on their own little mission, playing their own tune, following their own paths and desires, all wanting different things.

We're all focused on our own lives by nature, but not on the people around us so much. And so because we're all heading in different directions, playing our own tunes, wanting our own things, we're in conflict with each other.

All our different conflicting desires rub up against each other. And that's what leads to the problems we have in our society, and our homes, and our communities.

It leads to things like racism, which we've seen rear its ugly head in the news again this week. It leads to things like sexism, and inequality, and war, and all the other ills of the world.

It can really come down to a disunity, a lack of living in unity with one another. Even if you think about it, sickness and disease can be described as a disunity.

[2 : 07] Ask any medical professional. Cancer, for example, is basically a disunity of the cells in our body, in conflict, not working together like they should. Same with things like natural disasters and droughts.

That's a disunity of our environment. It's our environment and elements of our environment not working in harmony together, not working as they should. And that's why our food prices are going up, you would have noticed, because of the drought we've been having, because of the disunity of our environment.

So do you see how, really, all the problems of our world can be boiled down to one thing, and that is disunity? Do you see that? I hope you realize that this morning.

That's how the Bible, in many ways, describes the problems of our world. People and things not being in harmony with one another. In fact, that's how it all began in Genesis.

If we look at the first book of the Bible, how did sin and death enter our world? Well, it's when Satan caused Adam and Eve to what? Fall out with each other, and to be in disunity, and then them being in disunity with God.

[3 : 15] So Satan basically messed up this world by introducing disunity into it, and that spread and covered the face of the earth, and that's the situation we're now in.

Sad as that is. But you'll be pleased to know, the Bible also tells us that God is not going to leave it like this. God is planning to fix this world. That is the message and the hope of the Gospel.

It's the message of the Bible. It's the message that we, as St. Mark's Church, have been commissioned to take out into the world, that God is planning to fix it, and the Bible tells us how.

And the way He's going to do it, is to bring unity again. And to create, from all of this chaos, this noise with everybody playing their own tunes, God is going to create a beautiful harmony, in this world, which will one day cover the whole earth, so that all things, in heaven and on earth, will be in perfect unity, society, the environment, and even on a cellular level, there will be unity, unity, and then finally this creation will be, what God has always planned for it to be.

Isn't that a wonderful picture? Now, we've been working through Ephesians, and we've discovered some amazing things in it. I hope you've discovered them, if you've been with us, and seen them, and realized them.

[4 : 35] Not least of all, we've discovered that we, as Christians, as God's church on earth, have been called, to be the beginning, of that new creation, that God is planning. We've been called, out of this world, to live as citizens, of the world to come.

We've been called, basically, essentially, to be the start, of the new humanity, God is making. Now that is amazing, it is, it's mind-boggling, to think, that we ordinary, people, have been called by God, through faith in Christ, to be the start, of a new world, to be the start, of a new humanity.

And that's what we've discovered, amongst other things, in Ephesians, so far, in the first three chapters. And now it's in this part of Ephesians, the next three chapters, that Paul begins to describe, the way of life, that should characterize, this new humanity, that we're called to be.

And so it's no surprise, that before anything else, he begins in this section, by talking about, what? Unity. You notice that?

That's what this passage, Ephesians 4, 1 to 16, is all about. Unity. He begins it, by saying, at the beginning, I urge you to live a life, worthy of the calling, you have received.

[5 : 50] This is basically, the introduction, to the whole, next half of the book. And he's going to, outline how we must now, live worthy, of the calling, we've received. And then he goes on, to say verse 3, make every effort, to keep the unity, of the spirit.

Which, makes sense now, because if the new creation, is going to be, a unification, of all things, and if we, the church, are the foretaste, the first fruits, of that new creation, well then, what will mark us out, from the rest of the world, the first thing, we need to learn, to get right, is unity.

Because we are the beginning, of God, unifying all things. And so, unity needs to start, with us. And so, how do we do that? How do we learn, to be unified?

Well that's what this passage, is all about. And in it, Paul tells us, three factors, that need to be in place, that I want us to see, this morning. That need to be in place, in our church, before any real unity, can happen.

So, what are these three factors, that need to be in place, in our church, here are some marks, before any real unity, can happen, that will mark us out, from the rest of the world?

[7 : 03] Well the first is, our conduct, towards each other, needs to change. Conduct towards each other, needs to change. Look at verse 2, it says, be completely, humble, and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another, in love.

Okay, so God's whole plan, to bring his creation, into harmony, one day, begins, in our relationships, with each other. And by us, learning to do certain things, that go completely, against our instincts, like, to be humble.

Now, to be humble, essentially means, to not need respect, from others. That's what the original word means, which is hard, because we all want respect, don't we?

We all thrive, we hunger for, the respect of others, and when our, when we sense, a disrespect, respect from someone else, then we, we get aggressive, we get offended, when our ego, is hurt, that's when we lash out.

Now, respect, and wanting respect, and thriving for that, is, well, humility, is learning, not to need that, not to thrive, on the respect of others.

[8 : 24] That's what humility is, in the Bible. And that is vital, for unity, because, behind every fight, we have, is the feeling, of being disrespected. As I said, when our ego is bruised, that's when the fights begin.

And so, any real unity, requires first, that we learn, to suppress our egos, suppress our hunger, and desire, for the respect of others, and learn to be humble. Without, learning that, and that's why Paul starts, this entire section, of the Ephesians, with that.

Without learning, these basic skills, relational skills, of God's people, we won't be able, to do any of the rest. We won't be unified. So, humility, is something we need, to work on.

Secondly, gentleness, is something we need, to work on. Be gentle, he says. Now, what does gentle mean? Well, in the Bible, in the original, gentleness, basically means, literally, actually, it means, being willing, to waive your rights.

another very difficult, thing to do, isn't it? Because we all feel, we have rights, that other people, must, respect, and give us.

[9 : 32] And so, when you feel, that you deserve, respect from someone, maybe, you feel you deserve, obedience from someone, because you're in a position, of authority over them, you will make sure, you get that respect, or obedience. That's what we do.

When we have a right, to someone's obedience, or respect, we make sure, we get it. Well, gentleness, means not needing, to do that. Gentleness, means not being forceful, with someone, to do something, even if they should, be doing it.

It's not forcing them, to do it. Not pressuring them, to do it. And then, the third, attribute of, Christian character, that we're called to, for unity, is patience.

So, what does patience mean? Well, gentleness, means a willingness, not to take what you deserve. Patience, basically, means a willingness, to not give the other person, what you think they deserve.

Let me say that again. Where gentleness, means a willingness, not to take what you deserve. Patience, means a willingness, to not give, the other person, what you think, they deserve, when they've wronged you.

[10 : 43] And you feel, that they need to be punished, in some way, or told off, in some way, right? They deserve, at least to hear, what they've done wrong, if for no other reason, because it'll make you feel better. Well, patience, means not needing, to do that.

Not needing, to tell them off. Not needing, to give them, the punishment, that they deserve, unless, it's completely necessary, to raise it with them. And even then, you do it, in a patient way.

But this, this word, patience, doesn't only apply, to when people, have wronged you, it also applies, to just when people, plain irritate you. Right?

When they get on your nerves, when there's something, about a particular person, that just grates you, and rubs you up, the wrong way. It's not that they've, done anything wrong, it's maybe a character trait, or something, the way they laugh, or the, you know, what they do.

You know what I'm talking, of course you know, what I'm talking about. I can assure you, I can guarantee, that there is someone, in this church, that irritates you. Alright? That you find something, about them, that is just, irritating.

[11 : 45] And if there's not, well then you don't know, these people well enough, and just give it time. Okay, we all have people, in our lives, and in our churches, that irritate us, don't we?

Well you know, what patience means? Patience means, bearing with them, and bearing with the things, that irritate us, and overlooking those things. Paul describes it, as bearing with one another, in love.

Bearing with each other's, failures and flaws, and irritations, instead of insisting, that the person changes. And so that, that is the beginning, the very first, step, to unity, in our church.

It's learning to conduct, our relationships, with each other differently. Namely in humility, in gentleness, in patience. But do you see, how these things, go completely, against our instincts?

I mean, we don't do these, automatically. That's why Paul has to tell us, to do them. Our instinct, is to get respect. The respect we deserve, from other people.

[12 : 46] Our instinct, is to take, what we deserve. Our instinct, is to give, other people, the criticism, that we think, they deserve. Our instincts, are not, let's be honest, humility, and gentleness, and patience, are there.

And yet, these are vital, for us to work on, to spot, in our lives, when we are not, being patient, and humble, and gentle, to admit, those things, to ourselves, and to other people, and to work, on those things, because unless, we work on those things, and learn, these traits, in our relationships, and learn to do them, unless we do that, there will be no unity, and we won't be able, to show the world, what God is planning, and show the heavenly realms, what God is planning, like Paul has, instructed us, to do, and what God, has called us to do.

So, if we are going to be, the type of people, who exhibit the harmony, of the new creation, God is planning, we need to work, on these things, in our relationships. Will you do that? Even starting, this coming week, and beyond, will you spot, where you are lacking, in gentleness, and patience, and humility, and will you pray, and ask God, to help you, to work on these things.

And then secondly, the next factor, that needs to be in place, for unity to happen, is we need a shared relationship, with God, we read in this passage. We need a shared relationship, with God, because the truth is, looking at these requirements, that we've been seeing, humility, gentleness, patience, it already makes unity, seem pretty impossible, to attain.

Which is why, it can only happen, if each of us, have a relationship, with God first, a real relationship, with God. Firstly, because it's only, by knowing God, in his son Jesus Christ, that we can even know, what these things look like, humility, and gentleness, and patience, that we can't really find, in the world around us.

[14 : 46] What is, what does it mean, to be humble, and gentle, and patient, in your relationships? Well, there is one place, we can see, what that looks like, and that is, in the life of Jesus Christ, and how Jesus, treats us every day.

Jesus shows us, what these things, look like, and it's embodied, in when he came to earth, instead of, giving us, the justice, that we deserve, and that he had, every right to give us, when he came, to earth, no, he came humbly, as one of us, and he humbled himself, to the point of being killed, so that he could take on, what we deserve, and give us, what he deserves.

The complete opposite, of what is instinctive, for a human being to do, Jesus came to do that. He embodied, humility, and gentleness, and patience, and so now, he is calling us, to embody that, to this world, in our relationships, with each other.

But we can only, do those things, and start to work, on those things, in our lives, because Jesus, did them first, and we've experienced that. So unless you have, a relationship with Jesus, unless you've been, transformed by the gospel, and you get, what Jesus has done, you will never be able, to do these things, in your relationships.

And that's why, Paul later, in verse 13 says, 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 fullness of Christ.

[16 : 15] That's what he says there. So, what he's saying is, unity comes, as we grow, in our knowledge, of Jesus, and become like him. But there are other reasons, why a shared relationship, with God is vital, for our unity, which we see, in verse 4 to 6.

I'll read it again. There is one body, and one spirit, just as you were called, to one hope, when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.

Okay, so his point, the point Paul's trying to make, is fairly clear. He's saying, that the key, to two Christian people, really having unity, in their relationship, is first realizing, that they share, the same relationship, with God.

One Father. And they are driven, by the same one, Holy Spirit. And they serve, the same one, King. And that is what, is the foundation, of Christian unity.

It's amazing, the bond that soldiers, have in war. If you've ever heard, the stories, or seen, films, or series, like Band of Brothers, you know, I think Steven Spielberg, made that.

[17 : 29] And you see these, stories, of these soldiers, in war, who, even though, they're completely, different people, who would totally, not get along, in ordinary life, they become closer, than brothers, when they're fighting, a common enemy together.

When they're serving, the same purpose, under the same banner, resisting the same, enemy, working together, to achieve, the same objectives. Then it creates, a bond, that you can see, nowhere else.

Well that's the kind, of bond, that Christians, should have too. Because this passage, tells us, the church around the world, despite what we think, is one church, serving one Lord, empowered by one spirit, even if it doesn't seem, that way.

You know, so all those differences, that we have, with other denominations, all those, other Christians, who don't do, the same things we do, or things the same way, that we do, we must remember, that we nonetheless, share the same Holy Spirit, who works in us all, we share the same, baptism, in other words, we belong to the same, covenant people, we are part of the same family, and we serve the same Lord, even if we act like, estranged siblings, most of the time.

We still need to make sure, that we are striving, Paul says here, we must strive, verse 3, he says, make every effort, to keep the unity, of the Spirit.

[19 : 01] It's a strong, verb, when he says, make every effort, we must strive, to reflect the unity, that already exists, in us being part of the same family, and having the same father.

Like, brothers and sisters, who have fallen out, and yet, they work on their relationship, why? Because they're, they're in the same family, and they can't, they can't escape that.

They have to, therefore, reflect the unity, that already exists, in blood, by them being part of the same, family, having the same mother, and father. Well, in the same way, Christians, need to always strive, for work on the unity, despite our differences, because we are, children of the same father, we are in the same family.

Now, of course, this assumes, that we share the same faith, right? One faith. Paul also says, it assumes, that, it's talking about people, who, haven't drifted, from biblical Christianity, when it's people, people who have drifted, from biblical Christianity, and there are many, people who call themselves, Christians, and churches, who call themselves, Christians, who have, nonetheless, drifted from the one faith, we can't have any unity, with them, because we don't share, that one faith, we don't share, that one truth, and that's why, there needs to be, one more thing in place, for true unity, to happen in the church, and this is the last thing, I want us to see, and that is, we need effective word ministry, for true unity, to happen in our church, we need effective, word ministry, here we go, here's Nick, trying to sneak into the sermon, the importance of having a pastor, so he can keep his job, because I mean, let's be honest, why do you give money, towards supporting, a full time pastor, why don't you just fire me, and get together, and read your Bibles, and worship, why don't you do that, okay sure, the drumming won't be as cool, but, but surely, your Bible, and the Holy Spirit, are enough, to help you, to live and grow, as a Christian, surely, well they're not, according to what,

Paul says next, and these are very important verses, that I want you to see, not least of all for me, keeping my job, but we read them, from verse 11, look what he says, so Christ himself, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, and teachers, to equip his people, for works of service, so that the body of Christ, may be built up, until we all reach unity, in the faith, okay, so this is saying, when Jesus ascended, in glory, and he took his place, in heaven, where he is seated right now, ruling over his church, when he did that, you know what he did, at the same time, he sent us, special gifts, in order for us, to be the people, that he called us to be, he didn't just leave us, to our own devices, he gave us gifts, equipment, to help us, so what are these gifts, well Paul speaks about them, not just here, but in a few places, Paul speaks about these, spiritual gifts, that Jesus has given, to his church, different spiritual abilities, given to each Christian, to contribute, to the work of the church, and the Bible teaches, that every true believer, has a spiritual gift, at least one spiritual gift, which they are given, to contribute to the unity, of the body, and the functioning, of the church, and there's various types, of these spiritual gifts,

[22 : 35] I think, if you gathered them all together, from where they're listed, in the New Testament, there'll be over 30, explicit spiritual gifts, that are listed, and there are probably, more than that, but here in this passage, Paul only mentions five, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, which he says, are vital gifts, to the church, for the sake, of unity, to have any unity, we need at least, these gifts, but why are these five, and not others, that are mentioned, elsewhere in scripture, well what are these gifts, all have in common, do you see, what they will have in common, they're all gifts, related to word ministry, they're all word gifts, they're all gifts, to do with working, with the scriptures, the apostles, the apostles, and the prophets, were the ones, who originally revealed, the word, and wrote it down, in the scriptures, and then after them, the evangelists, are the ones, who take that word, out to the world, the pastors, are the ones, who use the word, to grow God's people, and nurture them, and the teachers, and the teachers, are those who study, and explain the word, so that we can understand it better, and of course, there's a lot of overlap, in these gifts, right, pastors should also teach, and can also be evangelists, but the point is, these gifts, these word gifts, and using them in the church,

Paul says, is essential to our unity, when these gifts, especially these five, are used, Jesus gave, these gifts to the church, so that, verse 12, the body of Christ, may be built up, and reach unity, the body of Christ, will only be built up, and reach unity, when these gifts, are being used in the church, and then he goes on to say, why, and I want you to look, in your Bibles, at verse 14, because here, from verse 14, he tells us, why these word gifts, are so important, for our unity, because then, we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth, by the waves, and blown here and there, by every wind of teaching, and by the cunning, and craftiness of people, in their deceitful scheming, instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become, in every respect, the mature body, of him, who is the head, that is Christ, so we need, effective word, ministers, to prevent us, from being led astray, by false teachings, and to help us, in our relationships, with each other, to speak the truth, in love, and both of those, are vital, for our unity, both truth, and love, it's a very important, little phrase, that he says there, in verse 15, instead, speaking the truth, in love, we need both of those, not just love, and not just truth,

John Stott, puts it well, he says this, I quote, thank God, that there are those, in the contemporary church, who are determined, at all costs, to defend, and uphold, God's revealed truth, but sometimes, they are conspicuously, lacking in love, when they think, they smell heresy, then their nose, begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle, enters their eye, they seem to enjoy, nothing more than a fight, others make, the opposite mistake, they are determined, at all costs, to maintain, and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so, are prepared, even to sacrifice, the central truths, of revelation, both these tendencies, are unbalanced, and unbiblical, truth becomes hard, if it is not softened, by love, love becomes soft, if it is not strengthened, by truth, end quote, and so you see, the ministry, of the word, in truth and love, is vital for our unity, but not only that, look again, at what else, word ministry, does for a church, from verse 11, again, so Christ gave, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors, the teachers, to equip his people, for works of service, so that the body of Christ, may be built up, okay, so the word ministry, of our church, is given, to equip the people, you, in the pews, to do works of service, literally, to do works of ministry,

I'm the pastor, but you are the ministers, according, to the Bible, I once went, into a church, that understood, this truth, and it was reflected, in their bulletin, because, in the names, at the beginning, when it says, who's who, it said, lead pastor, so and so, and then it said, ministers, everyone in the pews, and it's true, from what we read here, the pastors, are specially called, and gifted, and trained, to equip, the saints, the people in the pews, for the works of ministry, you're the ministers, and the work of the church, is yours to do, my job is to equip you, to do it through the word, and when you start doing it, then look what happens, verse 16, then the whole body, joined and held together, by every supporting ligament, grows and build itself up in love, as each part does its work, and there you have, just a beautiful picture, summarizing what Paul's been saying, this picture of a healthy body, working in unity, that is not sick or diseased, but it's working as it should be, each part is doing its work properly, held together in unity, by the muscles and ligaments, pastors and teachers, and truth spoken in love, so that not only do we grow, but we exhibit, a divine unity, to this world in chaos, as a foretaste, of what God is planning, for the whole universe, but notice, that only happens, when each part, is doing its work, when each member, of the church, is using their gifts, as they grow in the word, then and only then, will we grow into the church, that God has called us to be, and so in closing,

I ask you, to ask yourself, what gifts, have you been given, and what part, are you going to be playing here, at St Mark's church, in the months and years to come, let's pray for God's, guidance and help, as we consider that, Lord we thank you, for this morning, and we thank you again, that through your word, and through your revelation, through the apostle Paul, you have exposed, this truth to us, we thank you Lord, for those apostles, and those prophets, who caused your word, to be put down, for us to read, this morning, we thank you, for the evangelists, who spread it far and wide, we thank you, for pastors and teachers, who clarify it for us, so that we can, be equipped, to be the people, you call us to be, and so we pray Lord, that you would help us each, to consider, where we fit into the body, and help us, to be energized, to use the gifts, you've given us, for the building up, of your body, and for the, witness, of you, to the rest of the world, we pray this, in Jesus name,

[30 : 03] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.