

“The Tension Of Unity”

In Ephesians 4:3 Paul writes that one of the ways we walk in a manner worth of our salvation blessings (cf. Eph. 4:1, in light of 1:3-3:21) is “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”. Such unity among Christians is an important theme in the New Testament (see also John 13:34-35; 17:21-23; Eph. 4:15-16; Philippians 2:1-5ff.). Yet, at the same time, we are not to pursue unity at the expense of the gospel (see Galatians 1:6-10)—the very gospel which empowers us for and calls us to unity (Rom. 15:1-7).

These two strands of teaching (unity and fidelity to the gospel) bring us to some tension at a very practical level. It is hard enough to bring these two elements together in a congregation where enhancing unity with the strong teaching and application of truth (cf. Eph. 4:7-16) is important. It is that much harder when we try and bring them together in regard to other congregations.

I have always believed that the pursuit of biblically-shaped unity among congregations is especially important in small towns since most of the populace can largely see the entire panorama of area churches and professing Christians. Whether or not those who name the name of Christ can get along with each other can have that much stronger an impact.

And it is not just the people who have not trusted in Christ who need to see this. It is often an encouragement and a boost to the faith of Christians to see that the different congregations can fellowship around Christ.

Yet, this brings up a question in the minds of congregations like ours: How far can we go in unified efforts with other congregations?

In response to this difficult question I believe we can make two primary responses.

On the one hand, since we should not distort the gospel, we would not want to engage in services or activities where there would be a strong chance of the gospel being watered down. This would often prohibit us from engaging in outreach events with many congregations (unless we were sure they were solid in the gospel). It would also make it very difficult to do many regular church services together where ongoing teaching was taking place and the gospel would be defined and applied.

On the other hand, when it comes to activities where the specifics of the gospel will not be highlighted or community services where general Christian themes only will be emphasized, we have a lot of latitude.

This is why I have been involved in the ministerial fellowship here in Minden and why we as a church have been involved in community services.

We may not always agree with every aspect of a church involved at such a community service we promote, yet we should remember the emphasis is biblical unity. We are not putting our stamp-of-approval upon every thing each of the participating churches believes.

Finally, let me encourage us to pray for the health and unity of our churches in town. This is one of the best actions we can take in regard to area congregations.