“Unity in service”

TEXTS: Judg.8: 4-16; Ps.133: 1

OUTLINE:
- Meaning of unity and service
- The significance of unity
- The example of the 1st century Church
- Teamwork with heavenly focus.
- Implications for Church Growth.
- Conclusion

Introduction / Meaning of Terms

God has distributed a variety of gifts, and instituted a variety of offices in His Church, for the building up and perfecting of the body of Christ.

The demonstration of singleness of purpose in the fellowship we had last week with the Edmonton Church was quite outstanding. The uniqueness of this event is seen in the way brothers and sisters cooperated to achieve a common divine goal – the outcome is the great success that attended the fellowship. We were united in purpose and we were united in love. Everyone served in such a remarkable manner that portrayed the Great Barr Church as people who have been properly schooled in the things of the spirit. I can best describe the event as “a harmonious blending of Christians to achieve result”. God’s name was indeed exalted in the conduct of the entire programme. This sermon does not intend to flatter us, or blow our trumpets beyond reasonableness, but to truly commend us for being goal-oriented and to further encourage us to sustain our love for God and for one another, as we serve the Lord and helping one another run the race of life heavenward.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity“ (Psalm 133:1). The key word here is Unity. What then is unity? The dictionary defines unity as the state of being one; the state, the quality, or condition of accord or agreement; singleness or constancy of purpose or action; the combination or arrangement of parts into a whole.

"I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace“. (Eph.4: 1-3). The Holy Spirit challenges us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Service implies meeting the needs of, and subjecting one’s will to that of another. Jesus said He did not come to be served, but to serve (Mt.20: 28). “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal.5: 13). We are to be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Rom.12:11). “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor”. (John.12: 26)

The Significance of Unity

The Bible shows that the concept of unity is of great concern to our Lord Jesus Christ. Before He went to the cross, He spent quality time praying for the unity of believers. “...Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. ............I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;
If you found the material in this sermon useful please feel free to use it to the glory of God.

Moreover, throughout the Gospel according to St. John, there are many instances of the harmony that exists in the Godhead, where the Son and the Spirit are in perfect accord or agreement with the Father, with singleness of purpose or action according to the will of the Father: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (Jn.4:34); "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me" (Jn.6:38); "I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (Jn.14:31); "No longer do I call you servants,...but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from the Father I have made known to you" (Jn.15:15).

The importance of unity is further underscored by God’s platform for unity as identified in Eph.4: 4-6: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you”. We understand from the scriptures that the body is the church, and that the church is the “called out ones” – we! Yes, the people of God! If the body or the church is one, then, we must act true to this gospel fact. We must not allow anything to divide us. We must put measures in place to forestall divisions from occurring as the church grows bigger. It is also critical for us to be united because our faith (or belief) is one, our focus is one (one hope – the hope of eternity), our calling is one (the gospel); our baptism is one (immersion); we serve and remember a common Master (one Lord) in the observance of the communion, and have been begotten by a common Father to whom we all pray, who loves us and gave His son as a ransom for our souls (one God).

Paul pleaded with the Christians at Corinth to be of one mind, to truly agree. "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe’s household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (I Cor.1: 10-13). If Christ is not divided, then, it is sinful to divide His body. We therefore must remain united, not divided. There is great strength in unity. Our God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, and peace is an attribute of unity.

Paul implored Euodia and Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord (Phil.4: 2).

The example of the 1st Century Church
The early Church demonstrated great unity in all the things they did. “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So
continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” (Acts.2: 42-47). The Macedonian church was united in their liberality in giving, and Paul commended their efforts in giving beyond their means for the fellowship of the ministering of the saints. (II Cor.8: 1-5). We read in Acts.11: 26 that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. The people in Antioch must have noticed that the church was Christ-like in their ways of doing things. They must have been united, just as God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are.

Teamwork with Divine Focus.
The mother of Zebedee’s sons came to Jesus with her sons (James and John), asking that her 2 sons may sit on the right and on the left hands of Jesus. Christ then taught His disciples as follows: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you let him be your slave-- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mt.20:25-28)

As indicated in our text (Judg.8: 4-16), the men of Succoth and Penuel did not cooperate with Gideon. They failed to support his army when they were in pursuit of the kings of Midian: Zebah and Zalmuna. They reaped the fruits of their lack of cooperation. It is very essential to always team up with those who follow God. Neh.2: 17-18 shows how the men agreed with Nehemiah to build the wall of Jerusalem. ".................then they set their hands to this good work” Nehemiah was convinced that the God of heaven Himself will prosper them (Verse 20). The results: Neh.6:15-16 - “So the wall was finished on the twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. And it happened, when all our enemies heard of it, and all the nations around us saw these things, that they were very disheartened in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done by our God". We must work as a team in looking after each other (Neh.4:16).

It is very wonderful to work as a team. We always read of Paul and Silas, Paul and Barnabas, Aquilla and Priscilla, etc. This shows that it’s not sensible to attempt accomplishing God’s work alone (Eph.4: 11-13). “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ…..”. Ministry is a team effort. I Cor.3: 7-9 illustrates to us how we become useful members of God’s team. One plants, the other waters. God brings the increase.

Implications for Church Growth
In secular jobs, tasks are usually successfully accomplished by teams when team members are united in purpose, with each doing what he/she should be doing at the right time, and in the right place, and the focus of everyone is to achieve the deliverables within the set deadline. The case with the Lord’s church is not different in this context.
The first Century Christians were united in serving the Lord, and the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved. The Church thus grew from 3,000 (Acts.2:41) to 5,000 (Acts.4:4), and then to multitudes (Acts.5:14). Today if we continue in the same spirit, we would accomplish great deeds in the service of the Lord.
“Unity in service”

What does the Lord say? *Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.*” *(Mt. 18:19-20)*. Agreement in this context implies unity. This passage explains the viability of unity in achieving effective prayers. Husbands are enjoined to foster harmony in their relationship with their wives through understanding and honour so that the prayers of couples are not hindered *(I Pet.3: 7)*.

**Conclusion**

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works”. *(Heb.10:24)*. “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer” *(Rom.12: 10-12)*. “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” *(Phil.2: 1-5)*.

*GOD SAID IT. THAT SETTLES IT, I BELIEVE IT, THE BIBLE IS RIGHT!*