

Unity & Peace: It Doesn't Just Happen!

by Wayne Goff

Our congregation is a wonderful, loving, thriving environment for people who are striving to serve the Lord. Repeatedly we have heard our elders tell us this, and they know from experience. They have seen congregations which are not like that, but instead “bite and devour” one another (Gal. 5:15).

Recently I have had visitors tell me that they returned to worship with us while in the area because “they like the atmosphere.” I believe they can tell pretty quickly that we have a place that is welcoming and accepting, and it is appealing to them. Wonderful! I believe that is the exact atmosphere Jesus cultivated among His followers while He was upon the earth. “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him” (Luke 15:1). They were not welcomed by the self-righteous Pharisees. But Jesus came “to seek and to save” that which is lost! (Lk. 19:10). He knew how to make people feel comfortable and loved.

We are not talking about compromising with sin! Jesus told the adulterous woman brought to Him to “...go and sin no more” (Jn. 8:11). But He said this after telling her gently “Neither do I condemn you.” Think about that for a moment. Jesus is the Great Physician. He came to heal, to help, to save, and to rebuild. As His disciples, we must do the same.

Beware, brethren, lest there creep into any of us the self-righteous attitude of the Pharisees (Lk. 15:2). They hated Jesus for His popularity among the people. They were jealous, envious, miserable, sad people. Their fingers were worn out from pointing, I'm sure!

People with an overly critical disposition have forgotten that they are forgiven sinners themselves. We are all recipients of God's love, mercy, and grace. The church is a place for healing, helping, loving, and forgiving. Paul knew this when he told the Ephesian brethren to “walk worthy of the calling ... 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).

What a breath of fresh air in the midst of a harsh and critical world! So continue to work together, in love and humility, honoring and obeying God, being longsuffering and forgiving to all, just like He is to us! Yes, it takes effort and hard work, but isn't it worth it? I love this congregation, and thank God for it.

251601