

October 27, 2019

"...so that you may know him better..."



"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...his purpose was to create in himself one new man out of two thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached grace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Ephesians 2:14-22

As we have noticed over the past several weeks, God longs for a deep, intimate relationship with each one of us. From the beginning our Creator has existed in relationship and he wants us to be a part of that relationship with him and with each other. Almost Jesus' very last prayer before his death was, ***"...I pray also for those who believe in me through the message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."*** (Joh 17:20-21)

Paul tells the believers in Ephesus that Jesus came to bring peace, specifically between the Jews and the non-Jews; the Gentiles. But I am convinced that Jesus came to bring peace in all relationships and ultimately that is where the Apostle will take this letter; he will teach us to secure our unity.

Satan loves division and he is constantly working to create it in every relationship. Division serves his purposes well and derails God's purpose and his very presence in our lives. Satan finds it so, so easy to create division and destroy our unity, because he understands that our greatest weakness is our self-serving sinful nature.

That sinful nature functions in common and easily recognizable patterns. It all begins with conflict. A conflict happens whenever two or more individuals, existing in the same place and in the same time, have needs that are different. That's all it takes. I need this and you need that and now we are in conflict. All of us exist in conflict all of the time. Conflict is not the problem. How we deal with conflict is.

Nearly all of us deal with conflict the way the Jews and Gentiles of Jesus' day did. Their division began with a simple statement. 'They are wrong, and we are right.' Every conflict becomes a division when we move to this position and we get there very easily and very quickly.

Once we have wrapped ourselves in the 'cloak' of our own rightness and painted everyone else as wrong, our conflict has become a division and any hope for unity has been destroyed. That division is marked by several behaviors and attitudes that Satan uses to fan the destruction of unity. One of these behaviors is the use of broad-based labels. The 'Jews' were always right in their own eyes and the 'Gentiles' were always and only wrong. The Gentiles were 'sinners' and 'tax-collectors'. The Jews were the 'children of Abraham'.

These broad labels marked their division because it allowed them to no longer see individuals. Instead they only saw labels. Sound familiar? Other common behaviors that feed division include blaming, justifying, generalizing, threats, and angry outbursts. When we fail to own

responsibility for our own choices and blame our actions and attitudes on others we have chosen division over unity. That growing division will be marked by our generalizations about others flagged by words like 'always' and 'never'. As the selfish drive to win at all costs grows in us we use threats and angry outbursts to achieve victory always because we are 'right' and they are 'wrong'. We throw away our unity for the sake of those hollow victories and lose our souls at the same time.

The Apostle wants us to understand that in Jesus, our Father and God made peace with us, and through Jesus he makes it possible for us to be at peace with one another. ***"For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's household."*** Because of Jesus each and every one of us can access the Father through the one Spirit and each one can become a member of God's household. Our unity is God's desire. Our division is Satan's victory.

