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Grace Evangelical Church
Sunday, November 28, 2010
"Relationships Changed By The Holy Spirit"
I Corinthians 12:12-31

Life is made up of relationships.

Whether it's one on one between two individuals, or if it's between a husband and wife, or Dad & Mom and the children, or children between children, or at church, or at work, at school, or in the neighborhood, life is made up of relationships.

Sometimes, though, relationships look like this displayed in the Savage Chickens' Cartoon. One chicken says to the other chicken, "You've got a problem with avoiding personal accountability." The other chicken replies, "Ya, and whose fault is that?"

Then again there may not be words at all as depicted in this cartoon.

But God's desire for each of us is to have harmony in our individual relationships, in our families, in our extended families, in our church, at work, at school, and in our neighborhoods. He wants us to work and live together in cooperation as a team, as people working together in unity, as shown in this cartoon – Team Work.

Obviously that doesn't always happen as indicated in the Savage Chicken Cartoon. So how are we able to maintain harmony in our relationships, and if there is a break down in those relationships restore harmony to them?

That's what our text is about today in I Corinthians 12:12-31.

Note what the first direction that God gives us concerning keeping harmony in relationships.

I. God is the one who gives the harmony, yes, the unity in our relationships (I Corinthians 12:13). What does I Corinthians 12:13 say?
"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

When a person accepts Jesus Christ as personal Savior, the Holy Spirit gives the believer in Christ the very nature of God, His eternal life, yes the new nature, God's nature (That is called regeneration). The Holy Spirit also baptizes spiritually the believer by placing him or her into Christ's body His church. This happens to all believers at the time of their salvation. In fact, the word baptized is past action, meaning it has already happened, and that was when they and we accept Christ as personal Savior.

This means that the believer in Christ is now attached to Christ spiritually vertically and to other believers in the body of Christ spiritually horizontally, the true church of Christ universally. The believer has been crucified with Christ, buried with Him, and raised to new life in Jesus Christ. Obedience to water baptism is the outward manifestation of one's identification with Christ and his submitting to Him as Lord of one's life.

That attachment to Christ vertically and to other believers in Christ horizontally means that each believer in Christ receives the same harmony and blessings.

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Ephesians 4:3-6:
"Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all."

Note here a couple of teachings.

1. God has already given believers in Christ unity and harmony in the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3).

At the time the believer accepts Christ as personal Savior, the believer experiences unity with Christ and other believers in Jesus Christ. That unity in the Holy Spirit is a reality in individual lives, family lives, church life, and wherever the believer may be. This is true because Paul penned to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace. The true body of Christ world-wide, and the churches of Jesus Christ locally, such as Grace Church, have the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Each church has that position spiritually of unity with Christ and with one another in His church.

That position of unity for believers issues in God's blessings upon all believers in Jesus Christ as personal Savior.

2. Believers in Christ experience the same blessings united in Christ by the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 4:3-6).

- (1) Eternal peace with God.**
- (2) Eternal peace with other believers.**
- (3) Are in the same body – church – universally and locally.**
- (4) Have the same Holy Spirit living in them.**
- (5) Have been called with one hope – hope in the present, the hope of knowing that believers in Christ go to be with Him after this life, as well as the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.**
- (6) Have the same Lord – that is Jesus Christ as Savior, God and Master.**
- (7) Have the same faith – not just faith in the Lord, but the same deposit of truth, the Word of God – The faith once for all delivered unto the saints, as Jude teaches (1:3).**
- (8) Have one baptism – can refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit as mentioned in our text, or water baptism.**
- (9) Have one God and Father of all – All believers in Christ have the same heavenly Father. Our Father who are in heaven hallowed be your name.**

Here are mentioned the Trinity, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit, our experience with God our heavenly Father, the Word of God, and our hope in Christ. The essentials of biblical Christianity are set forth in these verse.

These are the blessings that each believer in Christ receives by being baptized by the Holy Spirit, joined to Christ and other believers in Christ.

What a fantastic position the believer has by accepting Christ and being placed into His body, His church, joined to Christ and one another.

Out of that position, then, comes the practical outworking of that unity in individual believers' lives, which the Holy Spirit has given to each true local church of Jesus Christ.

Position in Christ always leads to responsibility in Christ.

II. The responsibility of the believer in Christ is to keep the unity, the harmony, with Christ and with other believers in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:3).

This will be evidenced in the local body or church where the believer fellowships – in every relationship whether individually, in the family, and in the church family, as well as others outside the church family.

1. Keeping the unity of the Spirit in our relationships is an on-going experience (Ephesians 4:3).

That's why Paul told the Ephesian believers in his day and tells us today to **"Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**

(1) The words, "Be diligent" are a present participle- and the word, diligent, has the idea to endeavor earnestly continually, to strive for continually. Keeping unity in our relationships is daily deal.

(2) The word, "preserve" (present tense – continuous preserving) means to keep, to protect, yes, to guard (continually) the unity (oneness) in the Spirit in the bond (that which binds together) of peace.

(3) That is the peace which the believer has with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

(4) It is also the peace that God has won for believers in Jesus Christ to be at peace with one another.

Ephesians 2:13-22 tells us that Jesus Christ through His death and bodily resurrection has brought together both Jew and Gentile in one body reconciling them through the cross to Himself, so that both have access to the Father in one Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ.

Yes, it is the cross of Christ that reconciles the believer to Jesus Christ so that He is no longer an enemy of God but God's friend. But it is also the cross that reconciles each believer to one another so that believers can be at peace with each other in the church of Jesus Christ.

Only through the cross of Christ is their peace with God vertically and peace with believers horizontally,

2. Keeping the unity of the Spirit in our relationships is maintained by recognizing that in unity there is diversity (I Corinthians 12:12, 14-24).

To teach unity in diversity in our relationships, the Apostle Paul used the human body.

(1) The illustration of the human body.

1. The human body is one body while having many members (I Corinthians 12:12).

The human body is a unit as is the body of Christ, His church, which has many members.

2. The human body with its many members is still one body (I Corinthians 12:14-25).

To make his teaching understandable, the apostle Paul shows the necessity of different parts of the body such as the ear, the eye, the nose, and the hand. Although some parts of the body may not seem to be as important for function, every part of the body is necessary for the body to function in unity.

Paul is also quick to emphasize here that no part of the body can say to another part that his need has ended. Neither can any part of the body be the whole body.

What Paul is saying then is: The diversity of the body is necessary for the body to function as a whole.

Certainly, the human body is an amazing creation. How long does it take to think I will use my right hand? Or to think $2+2=4$? The human brain certainly is beyond human description, which is made by the Creator who knows all things actual and possible.

Answers for Genesis had this to say on their weekly email regarding unwrapping the DNA.

When it comes to storing massive amounts of information, nothing comes close to the efficiency of DNA. A single strand of DNA is thousands of times thinner than a strand of human hair. One pinhead of DNA could hold enough information to fill a stack of books stretching from the earth to the moon 500 times.

Although DNA is wound into tight coils, your cells can quickly access, copy, and translate the information stored in DNA. DNA even has a built-in proofreader and spell-checker that ensure precise copying. Only about one mistake slips through for every 10 billion nucleotides that are copied. If only our word processors were that good!

In that diversity, there is interdependence, and the mutual care and respect for each member of the body. Yes, as the Psalmist records, we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

(2) The application to believers in Christ today who follow the Lord.

1. As members of Christ's body, His church, believers are to recognize that diversity in the body brings Christ's unity to His church.

Such is easy to say. Yes, I believe that the church is one body. I believe that there is diversity in Christ's body. We are different people in our personalities. We have different spiritual gifts as Paul goes on and teaches in I Corinthians 12:27-31.

Sure that is easy to agree to. It's a great biblical theology.

2. Carry out the challenge that comes with the recognition that in diversity there is unity in developing our relationships with one another (Ephesians 4:3-6).

In other words, that continual diligence, the continual striving to continually guard, protect, and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is the real challenge for all of us – as they say, "where the rubber meets the road."

In letting the Holy Spirit use our diversity to be continually diligent to continually guard, protect, and preserve the unity we have in the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace, let me make the following suggestions.

(1) Realize what we have in Christ through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

You have the Holy Spirit dwelling in you. I have the Holy Spirit dwelling in me. You have peace with God, I have peace with God. We are at peace with each other. We are in the same body – Christ's church – universally and locally. We have the same Holy Spirit living in us. We all have the same hope, the same faith, the same baptism, and the same God and Father of all.

Yes, we all have this wonderful position in Christ. With our position in Christ, totally accepted by Him, we don't have to be on the defensive when we are criticized. We are secure in Christ.

(2) We must depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit within us through the Word of God to be continually diligent to protect and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Zechariah 4:6).

If we trust in ourselves to keep unity in our diversity, it will not happen. We are all selfish in the old nature, and we tend to push our own wares rather than what is good for the unity of the whole as Christ leads. Not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the LORD of hosts (Zechariah 4:6).

That said,

(3) Since putting to death the old nature we all have inherited from Adam, we are still at times going to say things and do things that cause the diversity in the unity to be disrupted or to break down (Romans 7).

Paul in Romans 7 talked about the fact that sometime he did what he didn't want to do, and didn't do what he should do.

When that happens is where forgiveness comes in. If that sin is against another person, individual, or in the family, or in the church family, or in another setting, the offender needs to go to the offended and ask his or her forgiveness. Then a person needs to ask God's forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not demeaning one's self, but is using God's grace to bring reconciliation to a relationship which can be restored and healed through the forgiving power of the living God through Jesus Christ. Remember Christ, the innocent one, provided forgiveness for us, so that we can be forgiven for salvation, but He also forgives us daily as we confess our sin to Him.

Still forgiveness is not always easy. Neil Anderson has these comments to make about forgiveness.

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People who try to forget find that they cannot. God says he will "remember no more" our sins (Hebrews 10:17), but God, being omniscient, cannot forget. "Remember no more" means that

God will never use the past against us (Psalm 103:12). Forgetting may be a result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness. When we bring up the past and use it against others, we haven't forgiven them.

Forgiveness is a choice, a crisis of the will. We choose to face and acknowledge the hurt and the hate in order to forgive from the heart. We agree to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Suppose that someone in your church says, "I have gossiped about you. Will you forgive me?" You can't retract gossip any easier than you can put toothpaste back into the tube. You're going to have to live with the gossip no matter how you respond to the gossiper. We are all living with the consequences of another person's sin, ADAM'S. The only real choice we have in the matter is to live in bondage of bitterness or in the freedom of forgiveness.

That's why God requires us to forgive, he wants us to be free from bitterness, anger, and bondage to the person who has offended us. Since God requires us to forgive one another, it is something we can do. (He would never require us to do something we cannot do. But forgiveness is difficult for us because it pulls against our concept of justice. We want revenge for offenses suffered. But we are told never to take our own revenge (Romans 12:19). "Why should I let them off the hook?" we protest. You let them off your hook but they are never off of God's hook. He will deal with them fairly—something we cannot do. The believer's responsibility is to extend the mercy of forgiveness and leave judgment up to God.

If you don't let offenders off the hook, you are hooked to them and the past, and that just means continued pain for you. Stop the pain; let it go. You don't forgive someone merely for their sake; you do it for your sake so you can be free. Your need to forgive isn't an issue between you and the offender; it's between you and God.

Then Anderson gives some steps for forgiving someone who has hurt a person in the past.

1. Ask the Lord to reveal the names of the persons who offended you and the specific wrongs suffered.
2. Face the hurt and hate. If you are going to forgive from the heart, you must let God search the depths of your heart.
3. Acknowledge the significance of the cross. It is the cross of Christ that makes forgiveness legally and morally right.
4. Decide that you will not retaliate by using the information about the offender's sin against them (Luke 6:27-34).
5. Decide to forgive. Forgiveness is a conscious choice to let the other person off the hook and free yourself from the past.
6. Take your list of names to God and pray the following: "I forgive _____ (name) for _____ (specifically identify the pain).
7. Destroy the list. You are now free. Do not tell the offenders what you have done. Your forgiveness is between you and God unless the offenders have asked you forgiveness.
8. Do not expect that your decision to forgive will result in major changes in the other persons. Instead pray for them (Matthew 5:44).
9. Try to understand the people you have forgiven. They are victims also.
10. Freedom is a result of forgiveness in you. In time you will be able to think about the people who offended you without feeling hurt or anger.
11. Thank God for the lessons you have learned and the maturity you have gained.
12. When appropriate, accept your part of the blame for the offenses you suffered, Confess your failure to God and to others (I John 1:9), and realize that if someone has something against you, you must go to that person (Matthew 5:23-26).

Someone gave this illustration regarding forgiveness.

A story tells that two friends were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey, they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face.

The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, he wrote in the sand:

Today my best friend slapped me in the face.

They kept on walking, until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but his friend saved him.

After he recovered from the near drowning, he wrote on a stone:

Today my best friend saved my life.

The friend, who had slapped and saved his best friend, asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand, and now, you write on a stone, why?"

The other friend replied: "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand, where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away, but when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it.

Learn to write your hurts in the sand and to carve your blessings in stone.

But there is another way to let the Holy Spirit in our diversity cause unity in our relationships to be continually kept with diligence.

(4) We never forget that in Christ and His body, His church, in our relationships together, we are spiritually related to one another (Romans 12:12).

To keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we must always remember that we are spiritually related to one another. We are born of the same womb, born by the Spirit of the living God possessing His resurrection life. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. As Paul writes in Romans 12:12, we are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love (of the same womb). In the power of the Holy Spirit we seek to treat each other with respect and honor.

(5) Spiritually related to each other in Jesus Christ, we know we have a spiritual interdependence (I Corinthians 12:21).

As Paul wrote in I Corinthians 12:21: "And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you."

We need each other in the body of Christ. Each one has his special niche in the family of God. It's the same in individual relationships and in the family unit. None of should think that a particular person is not needed in the family of God, or in any situation.

(6) Guarding the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace in our diversity, we display a mutual consideration for one another (I Corinthians 12:24-27).

In I Corinthians 12:24-27, Paul writes about members of the physical body which seem to have lesser honor, but God has given them more abundant honor because of their lack so that there should be no divisions in the body – that there would be the same care for one another.

What Paul is saying is that each person in the family of God is as important as the other. Yes, there may be different spiritual gifts that believers have, and there will be different roles that individuals play, but each should be give the same consideration and care, yes, the same honor.

It was discovered that a lady in a Christian home for the disabled needed a ride to a meeting. The ride she thought that she had didn't work out. She didn't know what to do. The President of the organization was contacted and he provided her the ride that she needed. That is mutual consideration in the body of Christ.

That means as well that in showing a mutual consideration for one another, we accept each other's differences in personality. Much study has been done in this area but one that I like is the one presented by Gary Smalley and John Trent in their book, "The Two Sides Of Love" looking at the four personality types.

Lion	Otter	Beaver	Golden Retriever
1. Takes charge	1. Takes risks	1. Deliberate	1. Loyal
2. Determined	2. Visionary	2. Controlled	2. Non-demanding
3. Assertive	3. Motivator	3. Reserved	3. Even keel
4. Firm	4. Energetic	4. Predictable	4. Avoids conflict
5. Enterprising	5. Very verbal	5. Practical	5. Enjoys routine
6. Competitive	6. Promoter	6. Orderly	6. Dislikes change
7. Enjoys challenges	7. Avoids details	7. Factual	7. Deep relationships
8. Bold	8. Fun-loving	8. Discerning	8. Adaptable
9. Purposeful	9. Likes variety	9. Detailed	9. Sympathetic
10. Decision Maker	10. Enjoys change	10. Analytical	10. Thoughtful
11. Leader	11. Creative	11. Inquisitive	11. Nurturing
12. Goal Driven	12. Group Oriented	12. Precise	12. Patient
13. Self-reliant	13. Mixes easily	13. Persistent	13. Tolerant
14. Adventurous	14. Optimistic	14. Scheduled	14. Good listener
"Let's do it now!"	"Trust me, I'll do it."	"How was it done in the past?"	"Let's keep things the way they are."

Smalley and Trent then add this about Lions, Otters, Beavers, and Golden Retrievers.

Lion	Otter	Beaver	Golden Retriever
1. Born leader	1. Want to have fun	1. Watch emotions closely	1. Very loyal
2. Want results now	2. Motivate to action	2. Read instruction books	2. Need close relationships
3. Time frame now	3. Tend to avoid fine print	3. Make careful decisions	3. Desire to please others
4. Decisive	4. Focus on the future	4. Use skills for problem solving	4. Very adaptable
5. Want Reader's Digest communication	5. Avoid confrontation at all costs	5. Live by motto: "Let's do this right."	5. Often react to sudden changes
6. Feel threatened by questions	6. Tremendous net-worker	6. Tend to turn anger inward	6. Hold stubbornly to what they feel is right
7. Not afraid of pressure or confrontation	7. Susceptible to peer pressure	7. Focus on the past	

Keep in mind that no personality bent is better than the other. That's why God's Word says that "comparing yourselves among yourselves you are not wise (II Cor. 10:12). Each person is a unique creation of God, making each one eternally valuable. At the same time, the Holy Spirit wants to use the strengths of each personality and change the weaknesses of each personality into strengths so the body of Christ can have unity and glorify Him.

Also God uses our personality differences in our diversity to sharpen each other, so in the giving and taking we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

(7) The unity of the Spirit is continually guarded with diligence in diversity by showing mutual sympathy to each one in the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:26).

I Corinthians 12:26 talks about if one member suffers the other member suffers with it. If one member is honored, other members rejoice with it.

Such is part of the diversity in unity because of believers being related to one another in Christ. If I hurt my finger the rest of my body can feel it, and suffers. So is it in the body of Christ, His church. When one member is hurting, the other members hurt with him or her. When a member of the body is honored, we all rejoice.

This means there is no competition or comparison in the body of Christ, or in our other relationships. We are all secure in Christ and seek to reach out to those in need, as well as are excited to see another person succeed and do well.

(8) In our diversity we guard and preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by encouraging one another through prayer, the spoken word and action (I Corinthians 12:26).

We forget sometimes how powerful prayer is, our words are and our service is. Life and death are in the power of the tongue penned the man of wisdom, Solomon. We forget how powerful our actions are as we serve each other in the body of Christ inside this building and outside this building.

Yes, our praying is powerful.

When you say that you are praying for someone, I trust that you do pray for them. Or you say that you are praying for a certain situation for someone, be praying for that situation, and then ask the person how things are going.

How powerful our words are.

I'm told that the Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was not an easy man to serve under. He was brilliant, demanding, and not one to shower his subordinates with compliments. Yet even Wellington realized that his methods left something to be desired. In his old age a young lady asked him what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. Wellington thought for a moment, then replied. "I'd give more praise," he said.

Tim Hansel tells of a letter from a former student.

The student wrote, "I may not be burned deeply in your memory, Tim, but you are in mine. And now that you've surfaced once again in my life, I thought I'd let you know.

"I remember the first day I had in P.E. when I was a freshman. We all had to run the 600 –yard dash and I didn't want to. I was always coming in last, no matter how hard I ran (And I always ran as hard as I could). But this one was different.

"O, I still came in last – by about 150 yards, as I remember. But I remember you running along side of me that last 100 yards yelling, "Good effort, Lou! Great effort! Absolutely magnificent....!"

"I felt like I'd won the Olympic Gold Medal for the marathon. And I became totally devoted to you because no one had ever encouraged me like you."

One of the best ways we can encourage people is look for their strengths rather than get caught up in their weaknesses.

Our serving others is powerful.

His name was Fleming, and he was a poor Scottish farmer. One day, while trying to eke out a living for his family, he heard a cry for help coming from a nearby bog.

He dropped his tools and ran to the bog. There, mired to his waist in black muck, was a terrified boy, screaming and struggling to free himself. Farmer Fleming saved the lad from what could have been a slow and terrifying death.

The next day, a fancy carriage pulled up to the Scotsman's sparse surroundings. An elegantly dressed nobleman stepped out and introduced himself as the father of the boy Farmer Fleming had saved. "I want to repay you," said the nobleman. "You saved my son's life." "No, I can't accept payment for what I did," the Scottish farmer replied, waving off the offer.

At that moment, the farmer's own son came to the door of the family hovel. "Is that your son?" the nobleman asked. "Yes," the farmer replied proudly. "I'll make you a deal. Let me take him and give him a good education. If the lad is anything like his father, he'll grow to a man you can be proud of."

And that he did. In time, Farmer Fleming's son graduated from St. Mary's Hospital Medical School in London, and went on to become known throughout the world as the noted Sir Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of Penicillin.

Years afterward, the nobleman's son was stricken with pneumonia. What saved him? Penicillin. The name of the nobleman? Lord Randolph Churchill. His son's name? Sir Winston Churchill.

Someone once said what goes around comes around.

Jesus said it another way:

Luke 6:38 --- "Give, and it shall be given unto you. They will pour into your lap a good measure – pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

May we let God the Holy Spirit this week cause us to have unity in all of our relationships to the Lord's glory!!

Chrysostom(A.D. 349–407 Archbishop of Constantinople, an important Early Church Father) put it this way:

"In essentials, unity. In nonessentials, charity. In all things, Jesus Christ."