

348 Unity – why and how?

This train of thought started with NTW's striking translation^{NTFE} of Ephesians 4:13a ('we should all reach unity in our **belief and loyalty**, and in **knowing** God's son'),^[346] noting how strongly **unity is based on relationship**. So I pursued the hare of the word 'unity' and came back round to that same chapter. In 4^{2,3} we again see that relationship is what unity is about – and again we see the strength of Paul's insistence:

Bear with one another in love; be humble, meek, and patient in **every way** with one another. Make **every effort** to guard the unity that the spirit gives, with your lives **bound together** in peace.^{NTFE}

But the hare started as Jesus, on the night before he died, prayed for us:^{Jn 17:22,23}

I have given them the glory which you have given to me, so that **they may be one**, just as we are one. I in them, and you in me; yes, **they must be completely one**, **so that the world may know that you sent me**, and that you loved them just as you loved me.^{NTFE}

Totally about relationship. But note the purpose: **that the world may know**.

Now just imagine the negative impact on 'that the world may know' if there were a church split over the issue of gay marriage. For the sake of the kingdom, it must not happen!

So, those of us who want change must, as Paul insists, be **humble, meek, and patient in every way**, and not insist that we are right. On the other hand, those who want to keep the traditional view must be **humble, meek, and patient in every way**, and not insist that they are right.

If we pray 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done', then we must 'make every effort' – and what does that involve? It must start with noting that unity is about how we relate 'our belief and loyalty'^[4:13], not about specific 'beliefs' – in this case, the nature of marriage.

So when we do disagree over individual beliefs, how do we deal with it? Historically, speaking, badly! In a series of spectacular messes, we've even killed people over beliefs about baptism (yep! – read about the Anabaptists, if you don't believe me). To make matters worse, just add politics into it, as with Catholics vs. Protestants.

Thankfully, we managed to avoid massive splits over the issue of whether women should be allowed to lead churches, and hopefully we can follow the same pattern now, over gay marriage. We have to ask those who hold the traditional view to be gracious and loving enough to allow gay people – as we have with women – to take a full part in the life of the church, without feeling judged for doing so.

When the church had the grace to accept women as potential leaders, it made it easier for **the world to know**, because the world just can't credit the idea of God('s representatives) discriminating against women. Can you see the parallel?