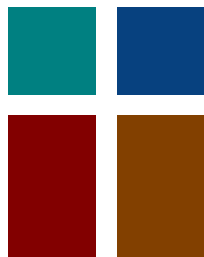


Shepherds' Notes



November 3, 2019

Unity in Christ is critically important. Shortly before His crucifixion, Christ prayed that we, His followers, might be one as Christ and the Father are one. Unity is very important to our Lord, as it should be to each of us (John 17:21). Maintaining our Unity in Christ is very important to the Shepherds here at Leander as well.

It is always difficult to deal with highly controversial issues. Therefore, our prayer is that these notes can help us on a path of unity within our diverse Christian community. It is NOT our purpose to clearly settle these controversial doctrinal issues in one simple document. Neither is it our intent to discourage further study and discussions in these areas. We pray that any such further study and discussion can be carried out with the deepest attitude of Christian love and understanding toward one another.

Many of the fine details of our Christian practices, particularly with respect to our time of corporate worship, are shaped in part by our own tradition (how many songs before the prayer, etc.). That does not mean that these traditional practices are bad (or good). When those traditions are in keeping with what the Bible teaches us about living for Christ, they can be very helpful. They provide consistency and “anchor points” in our Christian walk. Traditions that are clearly in conflict with the Word of God are, in contrast, a serious problem and should be dismantled when discovered. Because traditions (good or bad) become such “anchor points”, dismantling them can be a painful and disruptive process. This often manifests itself in divisions. We have seen such divisions happen again and again. Care should be taken when making changes, even in matters of our traditions. If we choose to make changes, we want to ensure that they draw the congregation closer to our God and our Christian brothers and sisters, rather than promoting disunity. What does this unity actually look like as we try to live our Christian lives in a fractured world? Are we expected to have absolute agreement on every detail of how we exercise our faith in our daily walk? This does not appear to be the message of Acts 15 or 1 Cor. 8

Are we to believe that anything goes, and that as long as we call upon Christ as our Lord we are unified, and nothing else matters? Looking at Matthew 7:21, this does not appear to be the case.

What then is to be the framework, or basis, of our unity? This has been a challenging question through the ages, and there is no expectation that a brief document like this one could settle that to everyone’s satisfaction. Still, it seems Ephesians 4: 1-6 is a very good general guideline for dealing with our differences while recognizing and focusing on core aspects of our unity.

¹Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to live worthy of the calling you have received, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope at your calling— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. - Eph. 4:1-6 [CSB]

Again, our purpose is to clarify the position of the leadership here at Leander Church of Christ on some of these issues in a way that promotes Christian unity in this local congregation as we strive to follow and worship God. We will briefly discuss several topics that we have seen at the center of disunity in churches around us, and outline how we hope to avoid such disunity at Leander Church of Christ.

Music in our time of worship together

God’s message to his people after they left Egypt on how to build the tabernacle and how to come before the Lord in their corporate worship contained incredible detail. The New Testament does not give us that level of detail in precisely how to proceed as we come together to worship God as His people. God has always wanted our hearts more than legalistic rule-following (Hos 6:6; Matt. 22:36&37). But, if we are to give Him our hearts, we will do our best to follow His teachings and grow ever closer to His heart.

While a lot is written about music throughout the Bible, considerable debate continues. Sincere Bible scholars of good intent have deeply studied the scriptures on the use of music in worship, and yet many continue to come to different conclusions. In this and other areas, there will always be

some disagreements among Christians about what is and is not permissible. However, as a congregation, we must make decisions regarding many details as to how we go about worshiping our God together. For numerous reasons, not the least of which is maintaining unity, the leadership here at Leander Church of Christ is deeply committed to remaining a congregation where we raise our voices in songs of worship and praise together to our God without the addition of musical instruments.

Women’s Roles

Once again, our purpose at this time is not to delve deeply into the doctrinal issues surrounding these topics. Rather, it is to look briefly at a few current topics that threaten Christian unity, in an effort to maintain unity here at Leander Church of Christ. Discussions of women’s roles in the church usually center on the concepts of leadership and headship. The idea of male headship (authority) and closely related concepts are discussed in numerous passages of scripture, beginning with Gen 2:18. Precisely drawing the lines between headship positions and leadership positions can be complex and controversial. Certainly, numerous women are mentioned in the New Testament in positions that include leadership in various ways.

Here at Leander, we are blessed to have numerous women who are active and dynamic in Christian service, leading in areas of ministry, and active in our various important committees. The service of these women is invaluable. The impact on this congregation and its various ministries would be devastating if we did not have their strength and dedication. However, we do not desire to expand women’s roles in a way that approaches putting them in positions of headship authority over men. We see no need to change the way women’s roles are currently handled at Leander Church of Christ.

Sexuality

We live in a challenging world. Many around us continue to work to normalize, and even celebrate, an ever-increasing array of sexual behaviors. God’s Word gives undeniable guidelines for the proper role of our sexuality. However, those entrenched in the values

of the world must see God’s love before they can understand the value of His teachings. Those in the world without Christ are slaves to sin (Rom. 6). We know that God loves us, and that what He

asks of us is for our benefit. The things He defines as sin are so defined because they harm us. **Whether sin is sexual sin, or sin of some other sort, the remedy is the same.** Those who are enslaved to sin need to know the love, grace, and transformative power that Christ offers them in order to be free from their slavery to sin. They need to see this love and grace in us as we help them come to know Christ.

The Shepherds here at Leander firmly believe that the scriptures clearly teach that the proper place for sexual union is between a man and a woman who are married to each other.

We truly want to deal with the issue of Godly sexuality effectively as we interact with the world around us with love and grace. To equip us in this effort, we have scheduled a seminar on this topic for January [more details coming soon].

Conclusion

It can be difficult to live out the various aspects of our vision statement among the people of the world around us. So many are so deeply entrenched in the values of the world, so distant from the wisdom of God, that it sometimes seems impossible to bridge the gap (1Cor. 3:18-23). In their effort to bridge that gap, some religious leaders have twisted God’s truth to make it more socially acceptable in our culture. Satan used this technique originally in the garden, and even attempted it with Christ in the desert. Trying to twist or change God’s message remains one of the greatest tools to, sometimes gradually, separate people from God. Clearly, we must hold true to God’s Word as we share His Message of Love and Grace.

It is a blessing to be a part of this family, unified in Christ. We look forward to continuing to work in God’s Kingdom as we share those blessings with the broken and hurting in the world around us.



Your Shepherds