

January 18, 2009

ONE FAMILY: THE SACRED BLEND

Vision Week: The Sacred Blend

1 Corinthians 12: 12-13

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.”

For Christmas I bought my wife a “Keurig”. Ever see one of these things? You put a little pod into the machine, push a button, and get a hot cup of hot chocolate, tea, or coffee instantly. You can buy coffee different kinds of coffee, caffeinated or decaf, special coffees like french vanilla, espresso and cappuccino. You can buy coffee from exotic places. You can also buy special blends of coffee. Coffee companies (and you have seen this in coffee shops also) will mix together coffee from two or more sources, roast them, and grind them into what they call special blends or even secret blends.

The apostle Paul, in our Scripture lesson today, tells us the way the body of Christ is put together is not a secret blend, but a sacred blend. I call it sacred because it is God’s idea. It is His “baby,” created and blended with His own hands. Although made up of different parts, we are one body. Though coming from different backgrounds, we are one body. Though we don’t look alike or act alike, altogether we are one body. Sometimes, people who really don’t have very much else in common come together in the church, in the body of Christ, and in Him they do have something special in common. It is a beautiful, sacred idea—truly a sacred blend.

Today I want to help us focus on this sacred blend and how we are one family in the body of Christ.

Our church Motto: The Forever Family, Knowing Jesus and making Him Known.

Our Mission: Make Jesus known to the world, welcome all into the fellowship of the “Forever Family” where together we grow in faith and holy living, worship God, and serve others.

(In other words)

Our Mission...is to be wholly transformed by the Spirit of Christ and to make disciples of all people.

Our Values

We value:

The souls of the lost (Lk19:10 NLT) The Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.
Personal integrity (Prov10:9 NIV) The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out.

Corporate worship (Heb10:25 NIV) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

The Word of God (Deut.6:6-9 NIV) These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

The gifts of God's people (Eph 4:11-13 NLT) Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

Wholesome fellowship (I John 1:7 NLT) But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

The family of God (Ps 133:1 NIV) How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!

I am using the word “Blend” as an acrostic to help clarify our vision.

OUR VISION: (is to be) A church of authentic Christians, loving God and others; committed to Christ, His Body, and His work in the world; passionate (excited, enthusiastic) about knowing Jesus and making Him known (with lips and lives). This will happen as we grow in faith, as we love one another, as we share our faith, as we worship God and as we serve others.

BLENDing the Family of God Together— “The Sacred Blend”

Bringing hearts together to celebrate, encounter, and adore our God.

Lending our lives to the faith community.

Engaging in practices for spiritual growth.

Never giving less than our best to God's kingdom.

Devoting ourselves to sharing God's good news with others.

The first is worship and it helps us by:

STRATEGY NO. 1: Bringing hearts together to celebrate, encounter, and adore our God.

Worship. Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Worship means different things to different people. Some even prefer certain parts of the worship service to others. We may focus on the music, the prayers, the offering, the sermon, or the Scripture reading. It actually takes all those things together to make up the worship service. But one other element is absolutely vital—the fact that we are doing it together.

I worship privately, when God and I fellowship together in His Word or through prayer. But there is something very special about uniting as a corporate body to celebrate, encounter, and adore our God—together.

One summer when it was 102 degrees in Dallas, someone asked Fred Smith, “Why do you go to church?” He sheepishly admitted that one August he had sat in church during a very predictable sermon and had written an essay outline on that very subject. His first reason was that Scripture commands it. His second was that he needed it at least once a week to position himself under the lordship of Christ.

Smith said, “He (God) and I are not partners; we are not equals. I am subordinate. Sitting there in church each week, I recognize and renew the subordinate position.”

While I heartily agree with that, I would add a third great reason for attending church every week: it brings me together with other believers in an atmosphere of worship, praise, and adoration of God that I do not achieve on my own. We enjoy that atmosphere because it is part of our sacred blend in the body of Christ.

A little girl sat with her father in a worship service. During the sermon she drew a picture of people coming and going from church. The people coming in were short and stooped, while the people going out were tall and straight. When her father asked her to explain the picture, she replied, “When we go to church, God helps us to stand up straight and tall.”

I believe one element of worship, when we blend our hearts and voices together, enables us to stand taller and straighter. No wonder the apostle Paul said, “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). Besides giving praise and adoration to God, the encouraging element of worship is so significant when we come together. It’s part of our sacred blend.

As we think further about this sacred blend...

STRATEGY NO. 2: Lending our lives to the faith community. Partnership. (Fellowship)
Acts 2:42

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”

As we work in partnership with one another, we accomplish so much more than any of us can achieve individually. Each of us, by lending our lives to this faith community we call the church, contributes something unique that no one else can offer.

Cal Ripken Jr. was the shortstop for the Baltimore Orioles baseball team from 1981 to 2001. He became known as the “Iron Man” because he remained in the lineup, despite minor injuries, for more than 2,600 consecutive games, spanning sixteen seasons.

At one point he was going through a batting slump. Critics suggested for the sake of the team he ought to take a day off, get his head together, and then get back in the game. An article in *Sports Illustrated* about that time described his “somber solitude.” He didn’t feel he was living in somber solitude, but a major article in *SI* gets an athlete’s attention. So he talked to Orioles pitcher Rick Sutcliffe during batting practice one day. He wondered aloud to Rick if he ought to take a day off. He said, “If I *knew* that sitting down would break this slump and end all the constant talk, I’d do it in a second.”

Sutcliffe looked at him as if he’d heard dumb statements before, but never anything quite this dumb. He said, “We need you in the middle of the lineup, in the middle of the field every day. The only problem you’re having is your hitting. Fix your hitting and all the other stuff will go away. The answer has nothing to do with taking a day off.” Then he added, “Or do it when I’m not pitching.” Without smiling, Sutcliffe added, “I’m pitching tomorrow night, and your name’s going to be in the paper one way or another. You’re either going to be in the lineup or in the obituaries.”

Now we don’t plan to come to blows over your involvement in the church, but that story does vividly illustrate how much we need each other. We depend on each other. Our partnership, each of us lending our unique part, is absolutely vital to the success of this church. It’s part of our sacred blend.

STRATEGY NO. 3: Engaging in practices for spiritual growth. Discipleship.

Matthew 28:18-20

“ Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’”

I read about a small church in rural Kentucky that prided itself in being a training ground for seminary students just starting out in their first pastorate. While interviewing a young candidate for pastor, a member of the search committee talked about some of the former pastors who had gone on to serve in prominent capacities. One was the president of a seminary, another was pastor of a large city church, and a third had served as president of two denominational conventions and an international alliance.

The young candidate was impressed. He asked, “How in the world did you find that many potentially great men in this little church?”

“Find them?” the committee member said. “We didn’t find them. We made them!”

That’s discipleship. When the church is at its best, it takes the raw material that comes to it and develops the human potential into greater and better Christians than would otherwise be true.

Strictly speaking, a disciple is a learner, which is what all of us must become—one who is learning to live more and more like Jesus Christ. J. Oswald Sanders said, “Disciples are not manufactured wholesale. They are produced one by one, because someone has taken the pains to discipline, to instruct and enlighten, to nurture and train one that is younger.”

Discipleship: the process of molding us into a greater and brighter likeness of Jesus Christ.

We believe as we engage in practices for spiritual growth that is exactly what happens. It’s part of our sacred blend.

Our fourth strategy is Serving or Stewardship. By this we mean:

STRATEGY NO. 4: Never giving less than our best to God’s Kingdom. Stewardship.

Luke 6:38

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

When we hear the word *stewardship*, probably most of us immediately think of money. Stewardship certainly does deal with how we use our money, but it is much more than that. It involves all of life. A steward is one whom God has entrusted with life and all its components—our time, our talents, and our opportunities, as well as our treasure.

In this sacred blend we call the church we can do so much more with our assets together than we can do separately. The family of God can do remarkable things. Whether we are talking about pooling our talents, combining our time, contributing our treasures, or working together on new opportunities, we are more powerful stewards together than we are individually.

In our sacred blend of the church, we’re simply calling on all of us to do our very best, even in small things. Dale Carnegie said, “Don’t be afraid to give your best to what seemingly are small jobs. Every time you conquer one it makes you that much stronger. If you do the little jobs well, the big ones tend to take care of themselves.”

Stewardship: it’s part of our sacred blend.

STRATEGY NO. 5: Devoting ourselves to sharing God’s good news with others. Friendship. (Evangelism)

Luke 7:22

“So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor.’”

“Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses,” (Luke 5:15).

“This news about Jesus spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country,” (Luke 7:17).

As part of our sacred blend, we are not content to keep God’s good news to ourselves. We have to share it. In fact, we are devoted to sharing it and one of the most effective ways of doing so is through building friendships with others. Through genuine friendships, we earn the right to be heard. And it’s natural to share good news with a friend.

Robert Crosby wrote a book a few years ago in which he talked about how Jesus is the greatest friend we can have. He made these points:

Jesus is a friend who will always love you. Although Judas was about to betray Him, Jesus washed his feet. Although the executioners nailed Him to a cross, Jesus asked God to forgive them. No matter what you have done, He is determined to show you His love.

Jesus is a friend who will always stick by you. Jesus was patient with His followers. Remember Peter’s boastfulness? Remember how the big fisherman bragged that he would never deny Jesus? Yet he did. Nevertheless, after the resurrection Jesus met Peter for breakfast by the Sea of Galilee and restored their fellowship.

Jesus is a friend who will tell you the truth. Jesus did not sugarcoat the truth. He told it like it was. His words sometimes stung, but He always had a purpose in saying them and He always gave people hope.

Jesus is a friend who is interested in what interests you. When Jesus met the woman at the well, they talked about water. If His opponents brought up the subject of taxes, He was not reluctant to discuss such things with them. He was always interested in things that interested them, and used those things as a bridge to spiritual discussions.

In our sacred blend, what would happen if we became such friends to others with whom we want to share the good news? What would happen if we became persons who always loved our friends? What if we became persons who always stuck by our friends? What if we became individuals who always told others the truth, even if it hurt, as long as we did it in love, while offering hope? And what if we became genuinely interested in what interests others? Do you not think this would open more opportunities to have authentic spiritual dialogue with our friends? Would it not give us a better chance of sharing the good news? I am not saying act friendly so you can share the gospel. I am saying be a true friend and there will naturally be openings to share your faith...but the friendship must be authentic, and not have any other hidden agenda.

Conclusion:

This blend is sacred because it is God’s idea and because it reminds us how much we need each other. Someone tried to express it poetically:

Dick needs Jane and Jack needs Jill
And Tom is Jerry's chum.
Need we mention Mutt and Jeff and
Tweedles Dee and Dum?

Sherlock Holmes and Watson
Were as thick as any thieves,
And don't forget that Adam
Was a bosom friend of Eve's.
Like ham and eggs or curds and whey,
Good friends go well together,
They're salt and pepper, fish and chips,
And stars 'n' stripes forever.
Yes, friendship is a fact of life
From Shreveport to Shanghai.
As Orville said to Wilbur,
"It's the only way to fly!"

Okay, so it's not a great poem, but I think it conveys a profound truth: we need one another. Don't ever get the idea that needing each other is a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength. The apostle Paul insists that the church is the body of Christ. It is strong and healthy when the parts are working together, each performing its function.

I challenge you today to think about what your unique part of our sacred blend is. What can you do that perhaps no one else can do? What can you provide that would draw on your strengths and make a real contribution to the total blend? Think about some practical ways you can use your gifts and talents to further God's kingdom through our church.

As we blend our Worship, our Partnership, our Discipleship, our Stewardship, and our Friendship, we will not only be a sacred blend, but a stronger blend of the Church, the Body of Christ, charged with the task of growing together and reaching others.

OUR VISION

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Bringing hearts together to celebrate, encounter, and adore our God. (Worship)

Lending our lives to the faith community. (Partnership)

Engaging in practices for spiritual growth. (Discipleship)

Never giving less than our best to God's kingdom. (Stewardship)

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