

"WON BY ONE"

YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE BOARD GAME CALLED "TRIBOND."

YOU'RE PRESENTED WITH THREE ITEMS & YOU HAVE TO DETERMINE WHAT THOSE THREE ITEMS HAVE IN COMMON.

FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT IS COMMON TO *CONSPIRATORS*, *NOVELS* & *CEMETERIES*?

THEY ALL HAVE PLOTS.

HOW ABOUT A *JOKE*, A *SAFE* AND A *WHIP*?

THEY'RE ALL CRACKED.

OKAY, ONE MORE – *PUNCH*, *HAIR*, *VOLLEYBALL*.

THEY CAN ALL BE SPIKED.

THE GOAL OF THE GAME IS TO BE ABLE TO LOOK AT THREE THINGS THAT SEEMINGLY HAVE NOTHING IN COMMON, LOOK BEYOND THE DIFFERENCES & DISCOVER THE COMMON BOND THAT UNITES THEM.

I THINK THAT'S AN EXCELLENT ANALOGY FOR WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO WITHIN THE CHURCH.

WE SEE SO MANY DIFFERENCES FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER & SO MANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A SINGLE CHURCH & WE'RE CALLED TO LOOK BEYOND THOSE DIFFERENCES & DISCOVER WHAT IS THAT UNITES THEM & FOCUS ON THAT ONE THING.

IT'S NOT AN EASY THING TO DO BECAUSE THE DIFFERENCES SEEM TO STAND OUT SO MUCH MORE CLEARLY.

WE OFTEN SAY, WHEN LOOKING AT DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS, THERE IS MORE THAT UNITES US THAN THERE IS WHICH DIVIDES US.

SOMETIMES THAT'S TRUE.

BUT SOMETIMES IT ISN'T.

SOMETIMES, THERE ARE COUNTLESS DIFFERENCES FROM ONE CHURCH TO ANOTHER – DIFFERENCES IN SIZE, DIFFERENCES IN MEMBERSHIP MAKEUP, DIFFERENCES IN WORSHIP STYLE & POLITY, DIFFERENCES IN THEOLOGY & THE CHURCH BUILDING ITSELF.

SOMETIMES THE NUMBER OF DIFFERENCES CAN BE STAGGERING.

BUT WHEN STOOD ALONGSIDE THAT WHICH UNITES THOSE DIFFERENT CHURCHES, A SINGLE COMMON BOND CAN OVERSHADOW A MULTITUDE OF DIFFERENCES.

THAT'S THE FOCUS OF THIS PASSAGE IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE CHURCH IN THE CITY OF EPHESUS.

HE BEGINS THE PASSAGE WITH ONE OF THOSE SEEMINGLY INSIGNIFICANT-YET-PACKED-WITH-POWER WORDS – "THEREFORE."

IT'S SIMILAR TO THE SIGNIFICANCE IN SCRIPTURE OF THE WORDS "BUT" OR "NEVERTHELESS."

THESE WORDS – WHEN WE SEE THEM IN SCRIPTURE – SHOULD MAKE US TAKE NOTICE.

IT'S BEEN SUGGESTED THAT WHEN YOU SEE THE WORD "THEREFORE" IN THE BIBLE, YOU SHOULD ALWAYS ASK, "WHAT'S IT THERE FOR?"

IN THIS CASE, IT'S A VERY IMPORTANT TRANSITIONAL WORD.

EPHESIANS GIVES US A VERY NEAT EXAMPLE OF SOMETHING PAUL DOES ELSEWHERE IN HIS LETTERS.

IN HIS THEOLOGICAL MASTERPIECE – THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS – PAUL SPENDS 11 CHAPTERS ON THEOLOGY – THE MOST PROFOUND THEOLOGICAL CONCEPTS EVER CONCEIVED BY THE HUMAN MIND.

HE THEN BEGINS THE 12TH CHAPTER WITH THE WORD “*THEREFORE*” AND EVERYTHING IN THE REMAINING 5 CHAPTERS IS A PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF ALL THAT HE HAS SAID UP TO THAT POINT IN THE LETTER.

THE SAME IS TRUE HERE IN EPHESIANS.

EPHESIANS IS COMPRISED OF TWO PARTS, EACH CONSISTING OF THREE CHAPTERS APIECE.

THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS ARE DEVOTED TO THEOLOGY & THE LAST THREE CENTER ON DAILY LIVING – PUTTING INTO PRACTICE THE TEACHINGS HE HAS SET FORTH IN THE FIRST THREE CHAPTERS.

“I HAVE TAUGHT YOU THIS & YOU SHOULD *THEREFORE* DO THIS.”

PAUL’S FIRST PIECE OF PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION DEALS WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF UNITY WITHIN THE FAITH. WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY IS A GOOD DAY TO FOCUS ON UNITY.

I HAVE ALWAYS FELT A TINGE OF EXCITEMENT ON WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY.

I FELT THAT EXCITEMENT LONG BEFORE I KNEW THAT THIS WAS A DAY CREATED BY PRESBYTERIANS.

IT’S A DAY THAT BEGAN AS A SIMPLE IDEA PUT FORTH IN A MISSION COMMITTEE MEETING OF A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

THAT IDEA GAINED MOMENTUM & WAS FIRST OBSERVED 77 YEARS AGO.

WHAT WAS THE WORLD LIKE ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER IN 1933—THAT FIRST WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY?

SURPRISINGLY, IT WASN’T MUCH DIFFERENT FROM THE WORLD ON THE FIRST SUNDAY OF OCTOBER IN 2010.

1933 WAS THE DARKEST YEAR OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION.

THE STORM CLOUDS OF NAZISM AND FASCISM HOVERED ALL OVER EUROPE AND THREATENED THE ENTIRE WORLD.

THE PREVAILING MOOD WAS ANXIETY—FEAR ABOUT ECONOMICS, FEAR ABOUT POLITICS AND FEAR ABOUT THE FUTURE.

SOUND FAMILIAR?

AS A FAITH RESPONSE TO THE FEARS OF THAT DAY & AGE, THE LEADERS OF THAT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH SOUGHT TO DO SOMETHING BOTH REAL AND SYMBOLIC - SOMETHING TO PROCLAIM THAT GOD WAS IN CHARGE -IN SPITE OF POLITICS, ECONOMICS AND THEIR FEARS OF THE FUTURE.

BUT “*HOW?*” THEY WONDERED.

HOW MIGHT ONE CHURCH COUNTERACT THE PESSIMISM OF THE LARGER SOCIETY?

HOW MIGHT THEY SUCCEED IN ELIMINATING THE WALLS OF SEPARATION BETWEEN CHRISTIANS?

WHAT BETTER WAY THAN THROUGH THE MEAL THAT UNITES US AS BROTHERS & SISTERS IN CHRIST?

I DIDN’T KNOW ANY OF THAT HISTORY WHEN I FIRST FELT A TINGE OF EXCITEMENT OVER THIS EVENT WE CALL WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY.

PERHAPS MY EXCITEMENT WAS FUELED BY THE FACT THAT I WAS RAISED LUTHERAN IN A ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY, ATTENDED A PRESBYTERIAN SEMINARY WHERE I WORKED IN A UNITED METHODIST CHURCH & THEN DATED & MARRIED A SOUTHERN BAPTIST!

PAUL IS CALLING US TO A UNITY IN THIS PASSAGE THAT LOOKS BEYOND ALL THAT WOULD DIVIDE US TO THE THINGS THAT UNITE US.

HE RATTLES OFF SEVEN “ONES” IN JUST A MATTER OF 3 VERSES – ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE, ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM, ONE GOD.

THE MYRIAD OF THINGS WHICH MAY DIVIDE US ARE DWARFED BY THESE 7 WHICH UNITE US.

ONE BY ONE, PAUL RATTLES THEM OFF.

PAUL CALLS US TO A ONENESS IN CHRIST THAT IS PERHAPS MORE DESPERATELY NEEDED TODAY THAN EVER BEFORE.

YOU MAY BE FAMILIAR WITH THE “*COMMON ENEMY THEORY*” IN SOCIOLOGY.

IT SAYS THAT PEOPLE WILL RALLY AROUND ONE ANOTHER WHEN THEY FIND A COMMON ENEMY.

I THINK THE BEST EXAMPLE OF THIS CAN BE SEEN AT SPORTING EVENTS.

IF THE HOME TEAM IS HAVING A REALLY BAD GAME & THE FANS TURN ON THEM & START BOOING & HISSING, ALL IT TAKES IS FOR AN OFFICIAL TO MAKE A BAD CALL TO TURN THINGS AROUND.

INSTANTLY, THE HOME TEAM & ITS FANS HAVE FOUND A COMMON ENEMY & THEY’RE REUNITED.

I THINK WE’RE EXPERIENCING SOMETHING SIMILAR TODAY IN TERMS OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH.

WE LIVE IN WHAT HAS BEEN LABELLED A “POST-CHRISTIAN” ERA.

WE LIVE IN A TIME WHERE AN ENTIRE MISSION FIELD LIES – NOT ACROSS THE WORLD – BUT AROUND THE CORNER.

WE’RE EITHER BEING TOLD THAT ANY FAITH IN A SUPREME BEING IS FOLLY OR THAT ALL ROADS OF FAITH LEAD TO THE SAME PLACE.

WE’RE LABELLED AS EITHER NAÏVE OR EXCLUSIONARY IF WE PUT OUR TRUST IN JESUS CHRIST AS LORD & SAVIOR.

IRONICALLY, IT IS THE WORLD & ITS THINKING THAT IS SERVING AS A CATALYST FOR UNITY WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

CHURCHES & DENOMINATIONS ARE RECOGNIZING THAT THE ONE BODY, ONE SPIRIT, ONE HOPE, ONE LORD, ONE FAITH, ONE BAPTISM, ONE GOD WHICH UNITE US ARE FAR MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PETTY DIFFERENCES WHICH DIVIDE US.

I READ THIS WEEK ABOUT JOHN MCNEILL, A GREAT SCOTTISH PASTOR, WHO CREATED AN IMAGINARY CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE MAN WHO HAD BEEN BORN BLIND AND WAS HEALED BY JESUS, AS RECORDED IN JOHN 9, AND ANOTHER BLIND MAN THAT WAS HEALED BY JESUS AS RECORDED IN MARK 8.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO IS THAT IN JOHN 9, JESUS HAD SPIT ON THE GROUND AND MADE MUD WHICH HE USED TO HEAL THE MAN’S EYES AND IN MARK 8 HE HAD JUST TOUCHED THE MAN’S EYES.

WHEN THE TWO GET TOGETHER AND BEGIN TO RELATE THEIR STORIES TO EACH OTHER, THE MAN WHOM JESUS

HAD HEALED WITH THE MUD SAYS TO THE OTHER, *“THAT’S GREAT, BUT YOU FORGOT THE PART WHERE JESUS SPIT ON THE GROUND AND MADE MUD TO PUT ON YOUR EYES.”*

THE OTHER GUY SAYS, *“I DON’T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT. HE JUST TOUCHED MY EYES.”*

THE MAN FROM JOHN REPLIES, *“BUT THAT’S NOT THE WAY JESUS GIVES SIGHT. IF HE DIDN’T SPIT ON THE GROUND AND MAKE MUD TO RESTORE YOUR SIGHT, THEN I’M BEGINNING TO DOUBT IF YOU CAN EVEN SEE AT ALL.”*

SO THE FIRST DENOMINATIONS WERE CREATED: THE MUDITES AND THE ANTI-MUDITES.

THAT’S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE PUT OUR FOCUS ON JESUS’ METHODS RATHER THAN MAKING HIM LORD – WHEN WE LET OUR PETTY DIFFERENCES GET IN THE WAY OF OUR ONENESS IN CHRIST.

WE NEED ONE ANOTHER WITHIN THE BODY OF CHRIST.

WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH – THIS CHURCH – THERE IS GREAT TRUTH IN THAT STATEMENT.

WE NEED ONE ANOTHER.

IN THIS PASSAGE IN EPHESIANS, PAUL USES THE WORD “ONE” 7 TIMES BUT HE ALSO USES THE WORD “CALLING” 4 TIMES.

EVERY ONE OF US IS CALLED TO A PURPOSE WITHIN THIS PARTICULAR BODY OF CHRIST.

WITHOUT ANY ONE OF US DOING WHAT WE ARE CALLED TO DO, WE CAN’T BE WHAT GOD INTENDED US TO BE.

A MAN APPROACHED A PASTOR AND TOLD HIM HE WANTED TO JOIN THE CHURCH BUT HE DIDN’T THINK HE HAD A LOT OF TIME TO DEVOTE TO SERVING.

HE SAID, *“I HAVE A VERY BUSY SCHEDULE AND CAN’T BE CALLED UPON TO DO ANY TEACHING OR CLEANING IN THE CHURCH OR REALLY SERVING IN ANY WAY. I CAN’T HELP WITH SPECIAL PROJECTS OR ACTIVITIES OR MISSIONS. ALL MY EVENINGS ARE TIED UP.”*

THE PASTOR THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT AND THEN SAID, *“I BELIEVE YOU’RE AT THE WRONG CHURCH. THE CHURCH YOU’RE LOOKING FOR IS 3 BLOCKS DOWN THE STREET, ON THE RIGHT.”*

THE MAN LEFT AND FOLLOWED THE PASTOR’S DIRECTIONS.

HE SOON CAME TO AN ABANDONED, BOARDED UP CHURCH BUILDING THAT HAD BEEN CLOSED FOR YEARS.

THE PASTOR MADE HIS POINT.

AND THE FRIGHTENING THING IS THAT EVERY CHURCH – INCLUDING THIS ONE - IS REALLY ONLY A FEW STEPS AWAY FROM BECOMING LIKE THAT THE CHURCH.

WE ARE CALLED AS INDIVIDUALS WITHIN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH & WE CALLED AS CHURCHES & DENOMINATIONS WITHIN THE LARGER UNIVERSAL BODY OF CHRIST.

WE HAVE A ONENESS TOGETHER BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN “WON BY ONE” – WE HAVE BEEN WON TO SALVATION BY JESUS CHRIST.

OUR CALLING IS TO SHARE THE NEWS THAT ALL HAVE BEEN WON BY THAT SAME ONE. AMEN.

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