

Follow God the drummer; Live in unity

Message for Sunday, August 3, 2014
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Galatians 5:22-26; Colossians 3:12–15;
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Part 1: Follow the drummer: follow God

We're going to have lunch after our worship service today. I thought it would be nice to make some bacon and tomato sandwiches. I need your help to do that.

First we need some ripe tomatoes. I'd like all the women on the left side of the room to say "ripe tomatoes" in a staccato voice and as fast as you can. "Staccato" means each syllable is sounded separately. *Demonstrate.*

Next we need bread and butter. I'd like all the women on the right side of the room to say "bread and butter."

Finally, I'd like all the men to say in a low voice, "bacon."

Now let's all of us say our parts together; say them several times over. *The result will likely be a cacophony of noise!*

Then teach each section with beat of drum:

- ◆ Ripe tomatoes: fast so each "ripe" falls on drum beat; i.e. 4 syllables per beat, still staccato. *Demonstrate here, and do the same with the next two.*
- ◆ Bread and butter: 2 syllables per beat so "bread" and "but-" fall on drum beat.
- ◆ Bacon: 1 syllable per beat, still low.

Now let's try it!

We could take this further, and add music. The first group sings a tune; the second group sing a different tune, but one that blends in; the third group, likewise, sing another tune. Wonderful harmony!!

All the different parts working in sync with one another is what makes for beautiful music. But when they don't follow the beat, all you get is noise.

All that is an introduction to this Bible passage. The connection is not obvious; I'll explain that later.

Galatians 5:22-26, New Living Translation:
But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control. Here there is no conflict with the law.

Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. If we are living now by the Holy Spirit, let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives. Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another.

There is a three-way partnership involved here.

- ◆ First, God works in our lives: "When the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us." God is like the drummer, and sets the beat. In the Bible, God shows us the way to live, how to treat other people, the dangers of getting carried away by pride or greed, and so on. God the Holy Spirit helps us to live this way.
- ◆ Second is my response to God: "Let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives." We listen to the drummer, and follow the beat. That is, we follow the way that God has shown us.
- ◆ Third is our response to one another: "Let us not become conceited, or irritate one another, or be jealous of one another." Even if we're following the drummer, it's possible for us to be out of tune with one another. We need to live in unity with one another, working together for a common goal. This applies to marriages, to families, to work, to the church.

The final result is that we all follow him in our family or church or work we can work in harmony and appreciate the uniqueness of each person.

Next Steps:

- ◆ Read the music: Read the Bible, learn what it teaches us about what God wants us to do.
- ◆ Follow the drummer: Obey God's commands. But not by our own power; rather, allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, enable us.
- ◆ Daily practice: Every good musician needs to practise every day. We need to daily spend time with God in prayer, and follow his way.

Part 2: Live in unity; live in love

In the first part of this message, I mentioned the importance of living in unity with others. I want to expand on that.

Colossians 3:12–15, Good News Bible:
You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves

with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord has forgiven you.

And to all these qualities add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity. The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called you together in the one body.

The foundation for unity is in the first sentence: “You are the people of God.” God is the one at the centre, not us. The New Testament writers often refer to the church as “the Body of Christ.” We are members of the Body; but the Body belongs to Jesus, not to us.

Just like the recipe for baking a cake, this passage gives the ingredients which create unity: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness. Some people look at that list and they see a wishy-washy person who gets trampled on, who always gives in, who will do anything to avoid conflict or bad feelings. That’s a misunderstanding of those words.

For instance, “gentleness” is sometimes translated as “meekness.” That’s the ultimate picture of weakness, to many people. Meekness is the balance between too much anger and too little anger. The Greek philosopher observed this about people:

Anybody can become angry -- that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – that is not easy!

You could say that meekness is power that is gentle and controlled in the proper directions. A horse is an extremely powerful animal. But a horse can also be gentle and meek: using that power for good, not destroying things.

Finally, to top off that list of ingredients – the icing on the cake, if you like – Paul says to “add love, which binds all things together in perfect unity.” In other words, love is the glue which creates unity.

Love is a funny word. If I say, “I love peanut butter and banana sandwiches,” you all know what I mean. You might think I’m weird, but at least you understand me. But if I then say, “I love my wife, Jane,” you might think, “Wow, this guy really *is* weird! To him, his wife is the same as a peanut butter and banana sandwich.”

And if we based our understanding of love upon what we see in movies and in paperback novels, then we’d really be in trouble. So, rather than going by what I say or what our culture says, let’s see what the Bible says about this thing called love. The best answer in the whole Bible to this is in 1 Corinthians 13.

This passage is often read at weddings. But it’s not just about married love; in fact, that section of the Bible is not about marriages or weddings at all. Chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians is about how we get along together in the church. So let’s read this together, thinking about how it applies to us in the church.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7, New Living Translation:
Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

What I’ve done is to combine all the ingredients in those two Bible passages into one list. Think of this as a checklist of God’s will for your life. You can use this to measure how much you contribute to unity in your relationships, and in the church.

Which of these words describe me in my relationships?

- compassionate: sensitive to others, reaching out with care
- kind: care for others in everyday ways
- humble: not proud, but thinking of others instead of myself
- gentle: strong, but not forcing my way
- tolerant: accepting others, even when we disagree
- forgiving: setting others free from wrongs they have done
- patient: willing to wait; make allowances for others
- not jealous: trustful of loved ones; content with what I have
- not boastful: not putting myself above others
- not rude: considerate of others
- not demand my own way: not self-centred
- not irritable: not easily upset when I don’t get what I want
- keep no record of when I have been wronged: forgive easily
- not glad about injustice: not vengeful
- rejoices whenever the truth wins out: even when I look bad
- never give up: always ready to give more, do more
- never lose faith: always trust
- always hopeful: can see the possible, not just the problem
- endure through every circumstance: always persevere