



UNITY AND LOVE

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Unity—So That the World May Know

JOHN 17:20-23 (CSB)

"I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me."

READ PSALM 133

POINT— Where there is unity, God commands a blessing of life!

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Based on what we've covered in the lesson so far, why is unity so crucial to our witness?

What are some of the biggest barriers to unity in the Church today?

EPHESIANS 4:1-3 (CSB)

Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.



Who are we in Christ *together*?

- Together we are the family gathering of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:29, John 1:12f).
- Together we are Christ's body and He is our Head (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15f).
- Together we are Christ's body that is filled with His glory (Ephesians 1:23).
- Together we are the place where all conflict can find reconciliation (Ephesians 2:16).
- Together we are a people equipped for works of service (Ephesians 4:12).
- Together we are built up and reach unity and maturity in King Jesus (Ephesians 4:12f).
- Together we are built up in love as we help each other (Ephesians 4:16).
- Together we are the community of Holy Spirit-filled worshipers of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians 3:16f).
- Together we are provided and cared for by Christ as members of His Body (Ephesians 5:29).
- Together we are Christ's assembly built by Him on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 2:20).
- Together we hold the keys of kingdom authority to be those who proclaim, teach, heal, and deliver (Matthew 10:7-8).
- Together we are God's flock gathered together and safe in the Father's hands (John 10:29).
- Together we are the dwelling place of God – Christ in us the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).
- Together we are the people of God: members of God's family; participants in all God's promises to Israel (Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 2:12, 3:6).
- Together we are God's True Temple, His dwelling place where heaven meets earth, the place for true worship (1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16, John 4:23-24).
- Together we are God's holy priesthood offering sacrifices of ourselves, our praise, our good deeds and our goods (1 Peter 2:5, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15f).
- Together we are witnesses with the risen Lord who is the faithful and true witness (Revelation 3:14).



- Together we are the literal body of Christ and share His mandate to preach the good news, to bind up the broken-hearted and to set captives free. (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18).

POINT — We cannot truly live from our individual identities in Christ without recognizing first our corporate identity in Christ. The one is made possible by the other. The ‘you’ in the New Testament epistles is most often speaking to the corporate body – the family of God.

PAUSE FOR PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

Jars Illustration and Activity

“In essentials, *unity*; in non-essentials, *liberty*; in all things, *charity (or love)*.”

—ST. AUGUSTINE, often quoted by John Wesley

JAR 1:

Cardinal doctrines—The Gospel and what is essential for salvation.

- Examples: man’s sin and spiritual depravity; deity of Christ; Jesus’ atonement on the cross; physical resurrection of Jesus Christ; salvation made possible by God’s grace and through faith alone in Jesus Christ, completely apart from human works.

JAR 2:

Basic teachings of the Christian faith.

- Examples: The Second Coming; heaven and hell; believers’ resurrection, marriage as a one-flesh relationship between one man and one woman

JAR 3:

Convictions and practices in a church or group of churches.

- Examples: Church governance; only male elder/ pastors; assurance/ eternal security; role of charismatic/ sign gifts in the church today; believer versus infant baptism

JAR 4:

Personal beliefs or convictions on various doctrines.

- Examples: timing of the rapture, millennial viewpoints, different viewpoints of election



JAR 5:

Divisive issues that the Bible spends little to no time talking about so we don't either.

- Examples: party politics, moderation/ social consumption of alcoholic beverages, coffee in the sanctuary, choice of Christian Bible translation, hymns vs. contemporary music, etc

PAUSE TO REFLECT

What are some of your individual core convictions? Where do they fit into the Jars illustration?

What are some things you could do to champion unity in your local church and community?

CONCLUSION

Take time to pray.

- Confess any areas that the Holy Spirit has brought to mind where you have fallen short in the areas of unity.
- Renounce any patterns of bad behavior that have created barriers to unity in your spheres of influence, in your church fellowship, and towards other church communities.

NOTES:



Unity—The Tough Questions

SESSION AIM: To explore and address some difficult questions when it comes to putting unity into practice.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

- How are we supposed to approach those who say they are Christians but whose doctrine and practice seem plain wrong in the light of our understanding of Scripture?
- Are we somehow to bear with them? Are we to separate from them? Or something in between?
- If we work with them, are we somehow condoning their error? Where would you draw the line and on what basis?

GOD'S WHOLE PURPOSE IS UNITY

- Unity is the culmination of God's plan. (Ephesians 1:7-10)

SATAN'S PURPOSE IS DISUNITY

- One of Satan's primary objectives is to cause disunity in the Church and to deceive us so that we don't realize just who we are as the Bride of Christ and what God has put into our hands.

IDENTIFYING SPIRITUAL WOLVES

- In Romans 16:17-18 Paul tells the Roman Christians to avoid certain people inside the church because they cause division.

But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

They give themselves away by:

- Their bad character;
- Not operating in the power of God;
- Looking out primarily for themselves;
- Teaching things that oppose the truth;
- Divisiveness



PAUSE TO REFLECT

Which of these characteristics would be the easiest to spot in a teacher in church who you suspect might be a wolf in sheep's clothing?

SOUND DOCTRINE IS CRUCIALLY IMPORTANT

- We need to know what is true and what we believe.
- What we don't explicitly teach, the next generation will regard as unimportant.
- The primary function of good doctrine is to help people become mature rather than as a test of whether or not someone is "OK".

PAUSE TO REFLECT

What would you say are some of the purposes of sound doctrine?

- Paul's remedy for someone with a good heart who happens to believe the wrong thing is this: "If on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you." (Philippians 3:15).

BEING IN CHRIST TRUMPS EVERY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US

- Ephesians Chapter 2:11ff: Paul begins to address the big "unity issue" of the day, the tension between Jewish believers and Gentile believers.
- We are one with other Christians whether we like it or not.
- How do we define who is a Christian? (Romans 10:9-10)

UNITY IS MAINTAINED BY LOVE, HUMILITY, PATIENCE, GENTLENESS, BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER

- Ephesians 4:1-3: The unity of the spirit is something that we *already* have. But we need to work at *maintaining* the unity of the spirit and that happens "in the bond of peace" not "in the bond of doctrine".
- It's a choice we make to be comfortable with disagreement on non-core issues of doctrine.
- It's about walking in humility, gentleness, patience, and a spirit of bearing with each other.

OUR DIFFERENCES ARE POSITIVE AND HELP BUILD US UP

- God has given us all different roles in the body and different giftings and temperaments (Eph. 4:7-16).
- Our differences seem at first sight to impede unity but actually, if handled well, they serve to build the Church up.



- The result of this is that we increase in our knowledge of Jesus and become mature.

CHRISTIANS WHO THINK DIFFERENTLY

- 1 Corinthians 8:4-14: Paul addresses a big unity issue of the day, whether it's OK to eat meat offered to idols.
- He concludes that it's OK to eat meat that's been offered to idols except when you do it in the presence of someone who believes it's not OK. Then it becomes sin.
- The sin is not the eating of the meat, it's the wounding of the conscience of a brother or sister in Christ.
- Someone who believes it's OK to eat meat has the "correct doctrine". But that's not the most important thing.

DOCTRINE IS IMPORTANT BUT FOCUSING OVERMUCH ON IT IS A SIGN OF IMMATURITY

- If you have come through to a place of maturity where you know who you are in Jesus and how incredible he is, it will lead you to live in humility and gentleness and kindness.

SEPARATION FROM CHRISTIANS IS ALWAYS WITH A VIEW TO RESTORATION

- Sometimes we are to separate from people who are Christians (1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11).
- As soon as the excommunicated believer repents, he is to be welcomed back.
- Excommunication is a form of discipline carried out with the aim of restoring the Christian who has taken a disastrous wrong turn (1 Timothy 1:18-20).

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives practical steps:

1. Go to the person privately, tell him how he has sinned against you, and be reconciled if he is willing. If the offending person repents, no more action is required.
2. If he won't listen, go back with two or three witnesses to have the conversation again, establishing the facts and the evidence.
3. If he still refuses to listen and repent from his sinfulness, bring him before the full church body and make the case against him.
4. If there is still no repentance, the church is to excommunicate the sinner. Jesus' words are "let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector" (Matthew 18:17, ESV).

Again, this is not about their doctrine. It is about a sin issue.



Love—A Hallmark Characteristic

What is God like? Who is He?

EXODUS 34:5-7 (CSB)

The Lord came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed his name, “the Lord.” The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The Lord – the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

When you read the passage above, what tends to get most of your attention?

POINT— This passage reveals a great deal about the nature and character of God. The iniquities of the parents may affect the family for three or four generations. But the Lord maintains faithful love for a thousand generations. We see a ratio of 4 to 1,000. That’s 1:250.

Verse six describes the Lord’s essence, His character. And it’s all about compassion, grace, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. This is who God is. He is love.

1 JOHN 4:7-10 (CSB)

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Do you think people struggle most to believe that they are sinners in need of salvation, or that God is love and that He loves them unconditionally? Why do you think this?

How do you think our perception of who God is impacts how we choose to respond to and relate with him? How does it impact how we choose to respond to and relate with others?

Love and Punishment



Balanced Love

The Importance of Loving One Another

MATTHEW 22:37-40 (CSB)

He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands."

JOHN 13:34-35 (CSB)

"I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 (CSB)

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forgiveness
- Love

PAUSE TO REFLECT

Based on what we've covered in the lesson so far, why is love so crucial to our witness?

How does the list above from Colossians 3 align with the Lord's character qualities in Exodus 34? Why is this significant?



What we do comes from who we are. We are loved, and so we ought to love one another.

- 'A new command I give you: love **one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love **one another**' (John 13:34).
- By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love **one another**' (John 13:35).
- My command is this: love **each other** as I have loved you (John 15:12).
- This is my command: love **each other** (John 15:17).
- Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love **one another**, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8).
- May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for **each other** and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
- Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love **each other** (1Thessalonians 4:9).
- We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the **love all of you have for one another** is increasing (2 Thessalonians 1:3).
- Keep on loving **one another** as brothers and sisters (Hebrews 13:1).
- Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love **one another** deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).
- Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love **one another**, be compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3:8).
- Above all, love **each other** deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).
- For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love **one another** (1 John 3:11).
- We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love **each other**. Anyone who does not love remains in death (1 John 3:14).
- And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love **one another** as he commanded us (1 John 3:23).
- Dear friends, let us love **one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7).
- Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love **one another** (1 John 4:11).
- No one has ever seen God; but if we love **one another**, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:12).
- And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love **one another** (2 John 1:5).



PUTTING INTO PRACTICE

1. Do you agree that the church is the place where unity and love should be modeled?

2. If the criteria of biblical love (agapé) was used to compare the relationships within your church, how well do you think you are doing?
 - List the strong points in this domain and why these are good examples for others to imitate.

 - Where do you find 'love' missing? Why might this be so?

 - What steps are needed in order to rekindle or ignite love and unity in your church?

3. Consider the church(es) in your town, city, and region. What does your unity in Christ look like? How do you love one another?
 - What are the barriers to loving one another?

 - What steps are needed in order to rekindle or ignite love and unity in your community fellowship?

 - What must you do and in what order, so that love and unity abound?