

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, July 16, 2025 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

T H E B O O K O F

EPHESIANS

How to live the Christian life

EPHESIANS: HOW TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – PART 23
“Preserving Unity” - Ephesians 4:1-3

“¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” - Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKVJ)

KEY BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR EPHESIANS

To gain a better understanding of the Book of Ephesians, consider the following background information:

1. **Authorship:** The Apostle Paul - Traditionally attributed to the Apostle Paul.
2. **Date of Writing:** A.D. 60-63 - Likely written around A.D. 60-63 during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
3. **Place of writing:** Rome – Paul wrote the book/letter of Ephesians from a Roman prison
4. **Audience:** Ephesian Christians at Ephesus and surrounding area Addressed to the Christian community in Ephesus, a major city in Asia Minor. Ephesians is considered a “circular letter” meant to be circulated to church in the area of Ephesus... possibly the same 7 churches
5. **Purpose:** How to live the Christian life To strengthen the faith of believers and address issues of unity and spiritual maturity.
6. **Themes:** Grace, the church, and holy living - Key themes include grace, the church as the body of Christ, and the importance of living a holy life.
7. **Structure:** Ephesus is divided into two main sections - Divided into two main sections: doctrinal teachings (chapters 1-3) and practical applications (chapters 4-6).

8. **Cultural Context: Ephesus was center of commerce and religion** - Ephesus was a center of commerce and religion, known for the Temple of Artemis.
 9. **Significance: Mystery of the gospel and inclusion of Gentiles** - Emphasizes the mystery of the Gospel and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's plan.
 10. **Spiritual Warfare: Ephesians' emphasis on the spiritual battle** Concludes with a call to spiritual readiness and the armor of God (chapter 6).
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Some Questions to Consider:

1. **If unity among believers is so important, how can we know when (if ever) we should divide?**
2. **What's wrong with the common view, that if you think you're humble, you're not? What is biblical humility? How can we cultivate it?**
3. **Since God's patience sometimes runs out, is it ever right for us to be impatient? Think carefully before you answer!**
4. **Why do loving relationships in the home and the church require effort? Isn't love supposed to be spontaneous?**

In coming to the subject of Christian unity, I am reminded of the familiar story of two old Quakers who were chatting. The one said to the other, "You know, sometimes I think that everyone in the world is a bit off except for me and thee. And, sometimes I wonder about thee!"

We smile at that story because we recognize ourselves in it. We all are prone to think, "I alone see things clearly and everyone else is a bit off." I wonder how people can be so blind as not to see things my way! As comedienne Merrill Markoe observed, "It's just like magic. When you live by yourself, all of your annoying habits are gone" (*Reader's Digest* [2/07], p. 107).

As all of us who are married know, when you put into close contact two individuals from different backgrounds, different personalities, and different genders, sooner or later there will be misunderstandings and conflict. If you add children, the potential for problems increases. If you expand the numbers to 100 or 200 or more in a local church, it doesn't take a statistician to figure out that the potential for conflict is at the alert stage!

Why is Christian unity so important?

Why is Christian Unity So Important?

(1) **Christian unity was important to Jesus so it should be important to us** - Shortly before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for unity among His followers, "*Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one*" (John 17:11). Later in the same prayer, Jesus asked "*that all of them may*

be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us. . . . I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity” (John 17:21–23).

Obviously, Christian unity is important to our Lord. *Why do you think our unity was so important to Jesus and how did He show it was important to Him?*

- (2) **Christian unity is important because it reminds Christians that we are united with the Father and the Son** - Jesus not only prayed for unity, but He gave the reasons that Christian unity is important: He asked that all believers may be in the Father and the Son, “so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). *What is so important about being united with the Father and the Son? What does this mean?*
- (3) **Christian unity is important because it reminds us that Jesus loves all of His church (us)** - And then Jesus prayed for “complete unity” so that “the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (verse 23). When Christians are united in Christ, the world sees two things clearly: Jesus was sent by the Father, and Jesus loves His church. *In what way(s) does Christian unity remind us that Jesus loves the Church?*
- (4) **Christian unity is important because it enable us with one voice to glorify God** - In **Romans 15:5–6**, we see another, more general reason that Christian unity is important, *“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (ESV). The bottom line is God’s glory. God’s people should be speaking with one voice in glorifying God. *In what ways is God glorified through Christian unity?*
- (5) **Christian unity is important because through it we grow and mature in the faith** - Christian unity comes with Christian maturity, and it is always something that we strive to attain. Paul instructs us to *“make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3). Helping us toward that unity are the gifts of the Spirit. God has given each Christian different gifts, and their exercise in the edification of the church leads to more and more unity. One purpose of the gifts is that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). *How does Christian unity help us grow and mature in the faith as believers? How does Christian unity show maturity?*
- (6) **Christian unity is important because the church is to be the functioning, living body of Christ in the world** - To promote Christian unity, God presents the church in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 as a living body. The body has many members, each with specialized work to do, but all the parts are united in the Head of the Body, which is Christ (see Ephesians 4:15). *What does it mean for the church to be the functioning, living body of Christ in the world and why would “Christian unity” have anything to do with this?*
- (7) **Christian unity is important because by it we receive support from one another** - Christians naturally form local communities in which no one needs to rejoice or suffer

alone (Romans 12:15; 1 Corinthians 12:26). *In what way(s) does Christian unity men support for one another no matter what one is going through?*

- (8) **Christian unity is important because it pictures the power of God and His saving grace** - Christians from many different backgrounds working in unity display the power of the gospel and the universality of its saving message (Galatians 3:26–28). Christians bring honor to God’s name by pursuing unity in the power of the Holy Spirit who brings us together as one through faith in Christ. *How does our unity in Christ show God power and His saving grace?*
- (9) **Christian unity is so important we should guard it carefully** - Christian unity is a virtue, but there are some things that can and should limit unity. We don’t pursue unity simply for the sake of unity; it is Christ and His truth that unite us. Scripturally, we are to separate from professed brothers and sisters in Christ who live in persistent, unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Corinthians 5:1–2) and from those who teach false doctrine (Revelation 2:14–15). “Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Romans 16:17). *As a whole why should we guard Christian unity and how do we do that realistically?*
- (10) **Christian unity is important as a work in progress and is something we must continually strive for as long as we live** - As Ephesians 4:13 intimates, we won’t reach full Christian unity until we attain “to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” So we probably won’t fully realize Christian unity in this world. But we strive for it. The unity that faith in Christ brings extends God’s love on earth and demonstrates the truth of who Jesus is. Unity in the church also foreshadows the worship in heaven, where a great multitude “from every nation, tribe, people and language” stands before God and cries out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb” (Revelation 7:9–10).

Unity among believers is a big deal in the Bible...

- *Jesus prayed for it just before He went to the cross (John 17).*
- *Paul has just spent the first three chapters of Ephesians arguing that God’s eternal purpose is to sum up all things in Christ (1:10).*
- *He has shown that the mystery of the gospel includes God bringing together two formerly alienated and hostile groups, the Jews and the Gentiles.*
- *He has made them into one new man, establishing peace (2:14-16).*
- *In Christ, both groups have access in one Spirit to the Father (2:18).*
- *Together, we are being built into a holy temple or dwelling place of God in the Spirit (2:21-22).*

Paul’s insight into the mystery of Christ was that the Gentiles now are fellow heirs, fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel (3:6). Thus Paul ends the third chapter by praying that the Ephesian Christians would be

rooted and grounded in love, so that they could comprehend with all the saints the infinite love of Christ (3:17-19). So, in chapters 1-3 Paul lays the solid doctrinal foundation that he builds upon with practical application in chapters 4-6.

“Therefore” (4:1) shows that what follows is inseparably linked to what went before. Chapters 4-6 show specifically how the church brings glory to God and to Christ Jesus (3:21). ***This is to say that sound doctrine always must undergird godly living...***

- ***If you focus on doctrine to the exclusion of practical application, you have aborted the process and will become arrogant.***
- ***On the other hand, if you focus on practical application without the doctrinal foundation, you will easily fall into legalism or superficial Christianity.***
- ***And so in almost all of Paul’s letters, he first lays the doctrinal foundation and then he applies it to the problems of everyday life. What you believe affects how you behave.***

It is also significant to note what Paul emphasizes first in this practical section. After discussing the lofty truths of God’s choosing us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless, we might have expected Paul to emphasize the need for holiness. He will do that (4:17-5:18), but first he emphasizes **Christian unity** (4:1-16). Of course, genuine unity always is closely tied in with holy living, so we shouldn’t make a false distinction.

“Genuine unity always is closely tied in with holy living.”

What do you think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree? Why? In what is genuine Christian unity and holy living tied together?

But the point is, instead of appealing to us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling, with all holiness and purity, Paul immediately states that a worthy walk involves all humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love. These are relational words. As you read through Ephesians 4-6, you can’t help but notice the importance of interpersonal relationships in the church and home. The call to follow Christ through the gospel is also a call to grow in loving relationships with one another. The first and the second great commandments are linked. As John tells us (1 John 4:20), ***“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.”***

So Paul begins with this appeal to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel by relating to one another in ways that preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. He makes three points:

“¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one

another in love,³ endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” - Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKVJ)

3 Important Point Concerning Preserving the Unity of the Spirit in our Lives:

- (1) *To preserve the unity of the Spirit we need to understand its importance*
- (2) *To preserve the unity of the Spirit practice the qualities that preserve it*
- (3) *To preserve the unity of the Spirit exert the effort to preserve it*

To understand Paul here, we need to notice an important distinction that he makes regarding Christian unity. In verse 3 he says that we are to *preserve the unity of the Spirit*. This unity is not something that we must work to achieve or attain to. It already exists. It does *not* refer to *organizational* unity, but rather to the *organic* unity which the Holy Spirit produces when He baptizes us all into the one body of Christ through the new birth. In 1 Corinthians 12:13, Paul states, “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*” So the unity of the Spirit is the organic unity of the one body of Christ, consisting of all believers everywhere who have been regenerated by God’s Spirit.

But, in Ephesians 4:13, Paul talks about *the unity of the faith*, which we must *attain to* as we grow to maturity in Jesus Christ. It does not yet exist. This is an experiential unity that grows stronger as we grow in the faith. It will not be perfectly attained to until we are all in His presence, free from all selfishness and sin, complete in our knowledge of Jesus Christ and the truth of His Word.

In our text for today, we are looking at the organic unity that already exists among all true believers in Christ. How can we preserve it, as Paul tells us to do?

TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT, WE MUST UNDERSTAND ITS IMPORTANCE

What is the important of unity in the lives of Christians and the church?

5 Reasons Unity in the Lives of Christians and the Church is Crucial:

- (1) **Glory of God** - Christian unity is a reflection of God's glory, as believers glorify God together in harmony.
- (2) **Witness to the World** - Unity among believers serves as a witness to the world, demonstrating the love and mission of Christ.
- (3) **Community and Support** - Unity fosters a strong and vibrant church community, providing support and encouragement to one another.
- (4) **Spiritual Growth** - Unity is essential for spiritual growth and maturity, as believers mature in their faith and knowledge of the Son of God.

(5) **Shared Purpose** - Unity allows believers to work together in perfect unity, not in perfect doctrine, perfect systems, perfect worship services, or perfect leadership.

What builds unity among believers? Unity among believers is built upon several key principles and teachings found in the Bible. Here are some of the main factors that contribute to this unity

5 Factors the Contribute to Unity Among Believers:

- (1) **Shared Beliefs** - Believers are called to share common beliefs and values, which fosters a sense of belonging and encouragement within the community. The truth is, we as Christians have way more in common than we do apart.
- (2) **Mutual Support** - The Bible encourages believers to support each other in faith, purpose, and love, creating a harmonious environment that reflects God's love.
- (3) **Spiritual Connection** - Unity is a deep, spiritual connection that transcends differences and reflects the love, peace, and purpose that God desires for His people.
- (4) **Service and Witness** - Serving together and reflecting God's love to the world are powerful expressions of unity among believers.
- (5) **Love and Forgiveness** - The Bible teaches believers to bear with one another and forgive any complaint against someone else, which is essential for fostering unity.

By embracing these principles, believers can build a strong and supportive community that not only strengthens their relationships but also serves as a testimony to the world about God's love.

The importance of unity in the lives of Christians and the church is a testament to the power of love and the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Verse 1 is a topic sentence that governs the rest of this epistle. Paul says *“¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”* Paul will spell out in detail how we can walk in a manner worthy of our calling. The importance of preserving the unity of the Spirit is implied, as I have already stated, by the fact that Paul puts it first. But, beyond that, we can specify three reasons that the unity of the Spirit is important:

3 Reasons the Unity of the Spirit is Important:

- (1) **The unity of the Spirit is important because Paul suffered for it** - After *“therefore,”* which shows the connection with chapters 1- 3, Paul refers to himself as *“the prisoner in the Lord”* (literal translation). Paul didn’t see himself first as the prisoner of the Jews or the prisoner of Rome, but rather as the prisoner in the Lord. His identity in Christ mattered more than his external circumstances. Paul opened chapter 3 in a similar manner, by identifying himself as *“the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you*

Gentiles.” Paul was in prison because the Jews in the temple in Jerusalem had started a riot by falsely accusing Paul of bringing a Gentile (from Ephesus) into the Jewish section of the temple (Acts 21:27-30). But Paul was willing to suffer for the truth that the Gentiles were fellow members of the body of Christ because he understood that truth to be tied up with God’s eternal purpose of summing up all things in Christ. Through the church, made up of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free men, God is demonstrating His manifold wisdom to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places (3:10). **So this unity of the Spirit is a big deal!**

Sadly, down through history the church has remained unified when it should have divided and it has divided when it should have remained unified.

- It has remained unified when it should have divided because when professing Christians deny the gospel, deny cardinal doctrines of the faith, or tolerate sins that the Bible condemns, there needs to be division, not unity.
- When denominations debate homosexual marriage or whether clergy can be practicing homosexuals, true believers need to separate themselves, because such matters are not up for debate if you believe the Bible.
- On the other hand, there have been many sad divisions among Protestant churches over minor matters where unity should have been preserved.
- Often these divisions stem from personality conflicts or matters of opinion on which Scripture is not precisely clear.
- For the church to divide along racial lines is to violate the core principle of unity between the Jews and Gentiles for which Paul was imprisoned.
- I realize that there are difficult issues, such as the doctrine of baptism or charismatic gifts or prophetic views, where godly Christians differ.

Sometimes, even godly men like Paul and Barnabas must decide to work separately because they cannot agree on how to carry out the ministry. But, unity among true Christians is a big deal. We should not divide over minor issues.

- (2) **The unity of the Spirit is important because Christ died to secure it** - Just before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for all who know Him to be one (John 17). As Paul has spelled out in Ephesians 2:13-18, it was through the cross that Christ broke down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and brought them together in the one new man, thus establishing peace. Christ died to create the one new man, His church. Preserving this unity is crucial.
- (3) **The unity of the Spirit is important because we are called unto it** - Paul directs us (4:1) to **“walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.”** He is referring to the effectual call of the gospel that saved us. He refers to this in Romans 8:30, **“and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified.”** Or, in 2 Timothy 1:9,

Paul says that God *“has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”*

The word *“worthy”* has the idea of weight balanced on a scale. The idea is, on the one side is the glorious gospel of God’s grace towards us in Christ Jesus. On the other side, our godly conduct should match this high calling, especially in loving behavior that preserves the unity of the Spirit. Have you ever had your picture taken at an amusement park where you put your head through an opening above a body that doesn’t fit? Maybe you look like a muscle-bound weight lifter. The head doesn’t fit the body. Christ is our head. As His body, we shouldn’t make Him look ridiculous. We should walk worthily of our calling as His body. Foremost, Paul says, is that we preserve the unity of the Spirit. But, how?

TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT, WE NEED TO PRACTICE THE QUALITIES THAT PRESERVE UNITY

“¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” - Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKJV)

Walking in a manner worthy of the gospel call implies a lifelong process. There will be setbacks, but the overall pattern should be one of growth in these godly character qualities. Also, note that you do not need these qualities when others treat you well. You only need patience and tolerance when someone is irritating you or being difficult to get along with.

While it is easier just to avoid such difficult people, Paul’s appeal that we practice these qualities implies that we are seeking to work through relational differences. Several of these qualities—love, peace, patience, and gentleness—are listed as the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23), showing that we must walk in the Spirit in order to grow in these graces. There are five listed in verse 2...

5 Qualities that Preserve Unity:

(1) **To preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need humility** - Paul says *“all humility and gentleness”* to show that we can’t be half-hearted about it. Humility is literally, *“lowliness of mind.”* The Greeks did not regard it as a virtue. It is, of course, the opposite of pride, which is at the root of every sin. Pride is the number one enemy of harmonious relationships. Humility is the recognition that all that we are and have are due to God’s grace. As Paul wrote (1 Cor. 4:7), *“What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”* Often I have read that if you think that you’re humble, you’re not. But that is neither helpful nor correct. It’s

not helpful, because how am I supposed to get it if I can't know when I have it? There are many verses that exhort us to be humble (Phil. 2:3; Col. 3:12; 1 Pet. 5:5). It would be very puzzling to attempt to become what we can't know if we've got it! And, it's not correct because Paul had told the Ephesian elders that he had served the Lord in Ephesus with all humility (Acts 20:19). So, apparently Paul knew that he had it and he didn't lose it by saying so! Briefly note two things...

Two Things to Note About Humility:

1. **Humility means being Christ-sufficient, not self-sufficient** - The proud person trusts in himself. He thinks that he can do it. You often hear, "you've got to believe in yourself." No, the humble Christian trusts in Jesus. He knows that if he believes in himself, he will fail big-time!
 2. **Humility does not mean dumping on yourself** - Rather, the humble person recognizes that God has graciously given him certain abilities that he is to use for God's glory and purposes. So, with Paul we can say, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God" (2 Cor. 3:5; see, also, Rom. 12:3).
- (2) **To preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need gentleness** - The King James Bible translates it as meekness, which we often associate with weakness. But that is not the idea of this Greek word, which is difficult to translate with a single word. It has the idea of "*strength under control.*" It pictures a person who controls his temper and does not retaliate or seek revenge. Secular writers used it of tamed animals. A tame horse is a powerful animal, but it is completely obedient to the tug of the master on the reins. It is gentle towards children. It is significant that Jesus used both humility and gentleness to describe Himself (Matt. 11:29), "*Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*" Jesus was tender with the bruised and broken soul, but strong and forceful with the proud, self-righteous Pharisees.
- (3) **To preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need patience** - The word literally means, "*long-tempered.*" It is the opposite of a person with a short fuse. Thankfully, God is patient towards us (Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). It is the first-listed quality of love (1 Cor. 13:4). To preserve unity, we must be patient with one another.
- (4) **To preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need tolerance** - I prefer the older NASB translation, "*forbearance,*" because tolerance has come to mean throwing out all absolute moral standards and not judging anyone for any sin. Clearly, the Bible spells out absolute standards of right and wrong and calls us on lovingly to confront or correct those who persist in evil or serious doctrinal error. But "forbearance" or "tolerance" in the right sense means bearing with someone's shortcomings or quirks. It means giving the other person room to be different in non-moral areas. Pride makes us think, "Anyone with half

a brain could see that my way is the best way to do this.” Tolerance says, “That’s not my preference, but it’s okay.” Finally,

(5) To preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need love - Don’t just “tolerate someone.” Do it “in love.” Love seeks the highest good of the other person. This keeps tolerance from turning into a grit your teeth and seethe on the inside kind of endurance. It also prevents tolerance from becoming indifference, where you think (or say!), “I don’t care what you do! Just leave me alone!” If you see someone doing something that will lead to spiritual harm, love cares enough to try to help him. Tolerance means that you wait and pray for the right time, but love motivates you to get involved if the other person will let you.

Thus, to preserve the unity of the Spirit, we need to understand how important unity is and practice these qualities. Finally,

TO PRESERVE THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT, WE NEED TO EXERT THE EFFORT TO PRESERVE UNITY

¹ I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” - Ephesians 4:1-3 (NKVJ)

³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (4:3). Endeavoring implies deliberate effort. It has the nuance of haste or speed, which suggests that we are not to allow disunity to fester. We are to go after it quickly. As Paul says (Rom. 14:19), *“So then, we pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another.”* Diligence and pursuing both imply exerting the effort to preserve this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. It won’t happen automatically while we’re passive.

Peace is the quality that binds us all together. Jesus said (Matt. 5:9), *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”* “Bond” is used (Col. 2:19) to refer to the ligaments in the body, that hold the bones together. Paul uses it to refer also to love as *“the perfect bond of unity”* (Col. 3:14). As Paul has already stated (Eph. 2:14), Jesus Christ Himself is our peace. When He rules as Lord of your life and as Lord of my life, we will enjoy peace between us.

Recently I wrote about *“5 Ways to Destroy Unity in Your Church.”* This week’s post is a follow-up, and I’m trying to be more positive. For those who want to do more than *not* destroy unity, how can we fight for unity in our churches? Here are 7 suggestions...

7 Practical Ways to Build Unity in the Church (among believers):

1. **Become more like Christ** - That may sound like an obvious, “Sunday school” answer, but it’s Paul’s answer in Philippians 2:1-11. The more your members have the mind of Christ, the more unified you will be as a church family.
2. **Deal with disagreements** - Too often people try to sweep conflict under the church rug instead of handling disagreement in a biblical way (Matthew 18:15-20). If there is an issue between two people, deal with it quickly.
3. **Refuse to gossip** - Gossip is an issue that’s easy to spot in others and easy to overlook in ourselves. We may pass it off as sharing concerns or sharing prayer requests, but if we participate in gossip we are destroying unity.
4. **Apply 1 Corinthians 13** - **(READ: 1 Corinthians 13)** I know most people think of the “love” chapter as a passage you’re supposed to read at weddings. But the immediate context is clearly talking about the relationships we have in our church family.
5. **Get busy with the mission** - Too often church members are divided and fighting because they’re not busy making disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). Get busy making disciples, and odds are you won’t have time to fight.
6. **Have realistic expectations** - I’m talking about the expectations you have about other church members, particularly about your leaders. Every member of your church is battling indwelling sin, so expect some conflict.
7. **Be intentional about relationships** - Relationships don’t happen on their own. If you want to promote real unity in your church, you’re going to have to go out of your way to build relationships with people you don’t know.

But the point is, although true unity among believers already exists because of the mighty work of the Sovereign Spirit, we must work hard to preserve it. Harmonious relationships in our homes and in the church will not happen automatically. At some point, your feelings will get hurt or you will hurt someone else’s feelings. There will be disagreements, sometimes over difficult issues. There will be personality clashes, when someone gets on your nerves. There will be different preferences, sometimes over minor matters, but sometimes over important things. To resolve these problems, we must understand how important unity is to our Lord. He calls us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling as saints. We must practice these qualities that preserve unity. And, we must exert a lot of effort to work through problems in a godly manner.

CONCLUSION

Jesus prayed that all believers would be one and love another in the same way He loves us. When we avoid, criticize, or argue with each other, we hurt Jesus as well as ourselves. But when we rely on the power of His Spirit working through us, we can achieve the unity He desires.

Here’s how you can pursue unity with other believers:

Practical Ways to Pursue Unity with Other Believers in Your Own Life

- (1) **Make no distinctions among believers** - Remember that, in God's eyes, there are no distinctions between His children who are in Christ – neither male nor female, young nor old, rich nor poor, etc. Don't let other believers' backgrounds discourage you from reaching out to them in love to build genuine relationships.
- (2) **Surrender your agenda to God's agenda** - Instead of letting your personal agenda guide you, make a habit of seeking God's will and fulfilling His purposes as you face decisions each day. Understand that God's plans for you involve working within the body of Christ rather than just on your own. Ask God to give you the ability to build close, trusting relationships with other believers and learn how to work together to achieve common goals.
- (3) **Immerse yourself in God's Word** - Invite God to speak to you through the Bible, which will transform your thoughts and help you see other believers from His perspective. Regularly read, study, and meditate on the Bible, and attend a church where you can hear God's Word preached often.
- (4) **Forgive** - Don't allow bitterness over ways other believers have hurt you to poison your soul and block your intimacy with God. Instead, obey God's call to forgive, and rely on the help He will give you to do so. Remember that God has chosen to forgive you even when you didn't deserve it, and that no one truly deserves forgiveness, yet it's a wonderful and healing gift from God. Whenever the people whom you forgive are alive and willing to reconcile, restore your relationships with them.
- (5) **Share the Gospel message** - Ask God to give you a renewed sense of compassion for the lost souls of the world and help you join other believers in the common goal of sharing the Gospel message with them. Let the experience of working together with other believers bond you into closer relationships with them. Be grateful for the love and forgiveness God has so graciously given to you all.
- (6) **Use your spiritual gifts to encourage and serve other believers** - Realize that every believer has a unique and valuable contribution to make to the universal church. Ask God to help you recognize and develop the spiritual gifts He wants you to use together with other believers to do His work on Earth.
- (7) **Overcome evil with good** - Don't be afraid to confront evil when you encounter it. Remember that God has given you and other believers the authority, through Christ, to overcome evil in all its forms. Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you discern what's going on spiritually in any situation, and stand firm against evil. Be aware that Satan wants to divide and distance believers from each other; resist this danger and overcome it with God's love.
- (8) **Celebrate Communion often.** Recognize that Communion is a powerful experience that spiritually unifies you with God and other believers. Celebrate it often, as members of the early church did. But be sure to evaluate the state of your relationship with God and other believers before taking Communion. If you need to confess sin or ask for or

grant forgiveness, do so first, and then you can participate in Communion with a clear conscience and in right standing with God.

- (9) **Seek to please God instead of other people** - Don't waste your time and energy trying to please other people, even if they are fellow believers. Instead, focus on pleasing God through your thoughts, words, and actions, and know that by doing so He will bring you into true unity with others.
- (10) **Constantly seek God's will** - Understand that every decision is ultimately a spiritual decision, because God cares about every choice you make, and your choices add up to shape what kind of person you become. Keep seeking God's will in all situations, including those in which you need His guidance to get along well with other people.
- (11) **Pray for each other** - Intercede regularly for other believers. Get to know them and regularly pray for their specific concerns. Share your concerns with them and ask them to pray for you, as well. Follow up with each other by talking about how God has answered the prayers.
- (12) **Respect church leaders** - Remember that Jesus Himself will judge church leaders; it isn't your place to do so. Ask God to help you respect them and be a blessing to them and others in your church.
- (13) **Control your thoughts and words** - Be proactive about choosing not to think negative thoughts or speak harsh words, which can bring great destruction in your relationships with other believers. Ask the Holy Spirit to renew your mind, and focus on thinking positive thoughts and speaking encouraging words.
- (14) **Ask God to show you His vision of what the church can be** - Pray for God to reveal His vision to you of what a loving, unified church should look like. Focus on that instead of the problems you see around you, and work to become part of the solution.
- (15) **Keep saying "Yes!" to God** - Whenever God calls you to do something, trust Him and faithfully answer Him, expecting Him to use you to accomplish good purposes.