




7. Attitudes of the Heart – Unity

Unity is not technically an “attitude” but the desire for, and pursuit of unity can certainly be classified as an *attitude of the heart*. God’s desire for the church is perfect unity. Jesus prayed that the church “may be one” (John 17) as such, much of the Spirit’s internal work has the purpose of producing spiritual unity in the church (Eph 4).

 **Discuss.** How would you define unity?

 1 Peter 3:8. **Q.** What did Peter encourage believers to be?


 2 Cor 13:11. **Q.** How did Paul encourage the Corinthians to be unified?

 1 Cor 1:10. **Q.** In what 4 ways is unity described in this verse?

Unity can be described negatively as “a lack of division” or it can be described positively as having commonality in our thoughts, desires, affections, pursuits and consequently, our actions.

The World’s Unity vs. The Spirit’s Unity


Unity is hard to come by in this world. Generally, worldly unity is artificial and fragile. Unity in the world is accomplished when individuals see it as in their best interest to lay aside differences. This type of unity is fleeting. When one party feels that his needs or wants aren’t being met he will, driven by self-interest, disrupt the unity. Spiritual unity is not this way.

 Eph 4:1-6. **Q.** What did Paul encourage the Ephesians to “keep”?

There is a stark contrast between the world’s “spirit of unity” and the church’s “unity of the Spirit”. The focus of a “spirit of unity” is unity for unity’s sake and often results in compromise and a lowest-common-denominator type of religion. The “unity of the Spirit” is a principled, spirit-led and spirit-empowered unity under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

In our day of countless denominations, worldly compromise and doctrinal ignorance there is a consistent call for the unification of the body of Christ. Oftentimes these would-be unifiers call for unity “at any cost”. They are willing to lay aside most anything that causes division, including distinct, biblical doctrine and standards of personal holiness. This is not Spiritual unity. Jesus himself said that there are times when division is necessary (Luke 12:51-53; Matt 18:17).


Spiritual unity keeps the Spirit of God as its center and its circumference. All that we are and all that we do must please the Spirit of God. For this reason, it makes no sense to compromise doctrine or holiness in an effort to unify. In doing so, we grieve our very source of spiritual unity and are left only with unity for unity's sake.


 **Discuss.** When might division be required instead of unity?

God's Provision for Lasting Unity

Spiritual unity does not come about by organization or outward pressure, nor is it driven by self-interest. Spiritual unity is produced by the inward work of the Holy Spirit as He motivates us to please our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Spiritual unity was a mark of the early church:

 Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1. **Q.** What phrase in these verses indicates the early church's unity?


 Acts 4:32-37. Verse 32 tells us that the early church was *of one heart and of one soul*. **Q.** How do we know that this unity was not driven by self interest?


Q. v33. What spiritual fruit was produced by this unity?

After the death of Jesus Christ, the disciples were initially distraught. They did not understand God's redemptive plan. The disciples on the road to Emmaus were sad, Peter returned to his fishing trade, Thomas doubted the resurrection. This was an opportunity for discord and dispendency but neither of these came to pass. Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples and gave them a unified commission (Matt 28:19-20), and told them all to meet together in Jerusalem (Acts 1:4). They were immediately unified in obedience to their risen Lord.

The Indwelling Spirit


The disciples, in obedience to Christ, met together and *continued in one accord in prayer and supplication*. Then, in Acts 2, we see how Jesus Christ planned for this unity to continue and to grow.


 Acts 2:4. **Q.** What provision did Jesus Christ send to the church?

 John 17:20-23. **Q.** The outpouring of the Holy Spirit as actually an act of the Father in answer to the prayer of Jesus Christ (John 14:26). What did Jesus pray for believers in this passage?

Christ's prayer was not primarily about practical unity in daily church life but about the spiritual union that takes place at the moment of salvation. This spiritual union with Christ, the Father and all other believers happens as God sends the Holy Spirit to dwell within the believer. In John 17:22, Jesus prayed *And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one*. The Holy Spirit is the "glory" which God the Father has given us and the means by which all believers are united to Him. We are one because we now share his very nature.

The Bible refers to this moment of uniting with God by his indwelling spirit as being "baptized into Christ" (Gal 3:27). For this reason also, the church is referred to as the "body of Christ" (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12)


 1 Cor 12:13. **Q.** What has the Spirit done for us? How does this verse speak of unity?

 Eph 4:4-6. **Q.** What 7 things speak of Christian unity?


All believers share the same Lord, same faith, same God, same calling, are part of the same body, and have been baptized by the same spirit. Our baptism into the body of Christ speaks of our *positional* or *spiritual unity*. This took place on a spiritual level at the moment of salvation and will never change. This unity is essential for, but different than, the practical unity which every church must *work* to achieve.

Unity Through Maturity

After Paul listed the seven things which bring unity from diversity in Eph 4:4-6, he went on to list the diverse spiritual gifts that exist within the unity of the church.

 Eph 4:12-13. Each of these gifts are for *the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ*. In short, they produce spiritual maturity. **Q.** According to verse 13, what result will the exercise of these gifts produce?

Unity, knowledge of the Son of God, and Christ-likeness are all marks of spiritual maturity. **Q.** According to verse 14, what other mark of spiritual maturity goes hand-in-hand with unity and Christ-likeness?

 **Discuss.** How do you think spiritual maturity contributes to church unity?

Unity in the church is produced when Christian men and women grow in the faith. This growth entails increasing in the knowledge of Christ and becoming stable in our doctrine. When we all seek to please the same Lord, studying and obeying the same Bible, adhering to the same doctrine we will naturally be unified. In contrast to this unified maturity, division in the church is a hallmark of spiritual *immaturity*.

📖 1 Cor 3:1-4. **Q.** v1-2. How could Paul *not* speak to the Corinthians? **Q.** What do these verses indicate about their spiritual maturity?

Q. v3-4. What evidence did Paul give of their spiritual immaturity?

📖 Prov 6:16-19. **Q.** What does God think about someone who “soweth discord among brethren”?

Church unity is the product of men and women growing in the Lord and walking in the Spirit. As an individual Christian matures he grows in love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. These are the *fruit* or evidence of the Spirit’s working (Gal 5:22-23). This spiritual fruit is developed in each and every growing Christian and as such, leads them to have new and increasing areas of commonality. *The Christ-like character in me, will not clash with the Christ-like character in you!*

📖 Rom 15:5-6. **Q.** What did Paul want God to do for the Romans?

Q. On what basis were they to be *likeminded*? (according to..)

Q. What would the result of this *likemindedness* be?

In the church we do not need to search in vain for areas of common interest. We are not strangers trying to get along. We are brothers and sisters in Christ with the exact same Spirit working to make us all like Jesus Christ. Our love for the Lord Jesus Christ and the transforming power of the Spirit of God is what produces the ability for us to walk in supernatural unity. For this reason *a growing church is a unified church.*

Unity Through Labour

📖 Eph 4:3. **Q.** What word in this verse speaks of the *effort* required to maintain unity in the church?

Like many aspects of the Christian life, unity is two-fold. It involves both God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. On one hand there is God’s sovereign provision of the Holy Spirit as the source of our unity and on the other hand there is our responsibility to *endeavour to keep* unity. To *endeavour* means to use “diligence”, “labour” and “effort”. In other words, unity takes work!

📖 Php 2:1-2. In verse 1 of this passage Paul is giving the reasoning or motivations for his exhortation to unity. The word *if* found in this verse can be better understood as “because”. **Q.** What 4 things does Paul list as motivations for unity?

1. _____ 2. _____

3. _____ 4. _____


Q. Being motivated by the 4 blessings in verse one, what does Paul exhort the church to do in verse 2?

The encouragement and comfort we have in Christ, the fellowship we have with the Spirit and the mercies which God has shown us should motivate us in gratitude, indebtedness and obedience to labour to keep the unity in the church.

Spiritual Attitudes That Maintain Unity

As we have already learned, spiritual maturity leads to unity in the church. The reason for this is that spiritually mature Christians will exhibit Christ-like character qualities. When we learn to respond to hurts, offenses and accusations with the meekness and gentleness that Christ did, we will be well on the way to maintaining unity in the church.

Now, let's explore a few of the spiritual attitudes which maintain unity.

 Eph 4:2-6. **Q.** In this passage Paul is telling the Ephesians to *walk worthy* of their salvation and to work at maintaining unity in the Spirit. What six attitudes are essential for keeping this unity?


1. _____ 2. _____


3. _____ 4. _____


5. _____ 6. _____

Humility (lowliness)


Humility is one of the overarching character qualities that should define all Christians. God abhors pride. It was the very sin that had Satan cast from Heaven. It had no place in the presence of God in heaven, nor does it have a place in His church.

 Php 2:5-8. **Q.** What quality of Christ does Paul tell us we should exhibit? How would this contribute to unity in the church?

 **Discuss.** How might exercising humility help to maintain unity in the church?


 Prov 13:10. **Q.** What is pride always the cause of?

Pride will, without fail, bring about arguments and offenses in the church. We *can* expect to find ourselves in situations where we disagree with others. The question is, how do we respond? Do we allow a contentious conversation to ensue so that we can prove our point? Do we go out of our way to prove ourselves right? Do we dwell on the disagreement? Do we involve others? All of these responses are driven by pride, show a lack of humility and will result in disunity.

 Phil 2:1-3. **Q.** In this passage Paul is encouraging the Philippians to be *likeminded*, to have the *same love*, to be of *one accord* and *one mind*. In verse 3 he tells us how to maintain this unity. How should we never allow things to be done?


Q. What attitude *should* we have? How does this affect the way we view others?


Romans 12:16 tells us not to “mind high things” and to “condescend to men of low estate”. Romans 12:10 tells us to be “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love” and to “prefer one another”. Humility involves considering others as superior to ourselves. In a world driven by pride, that is a very difficult thing to do. Our flesh naturally desires pre-eminence and oftentimes attains it by looking down upon others. God hates pride and has designed the entire salvation plan so as to exclude any human boasting. For the sake of spiritual unity we should ensure that nothing that we do has even a hint of fleshly pride.

 **Discuss.** How might thinking of others as better than ourselves show itself practically?

Meekness

“Meekness” is a humble attitude that expresses itself in the patient endurance of offenses. A meek person does not assert himself. He does not “always have to be right”. He does not engage in arguments which cause strife. He does not react harshly. He has learned how to maintain unity by putting down his own pride and making peace his priority.

 Prov 16:32. **Q.** Who is *better than the mighty*? Who is better than one who *taketh a city*?

 Prov 15:1. **Q.** If we find ourselves in a situation where someone is upset with us or “looking for an argument”, how should we respond?

Q. What is the likely result of this response?

Q. What is likely to happen if we respond to this person on their terms with anger, sarcasm or criticism?

It takes two to argue. Oftentimes those who are disgruntled look for opportunities to cause strife. They approach you with an angry, irritated tone or sarcastic words hoping to evoke an emotional response from you. When you oblige them by reacting with the same attitude they have, you have allowed them to successfully “stir up anger” and consequently, to cause division in the church. On the other hand, if you were to respond to this person with meekness, gentleness and humility it would have the same effect as throwing water on a fire. You rob the person of the fuel they need to fan their anger into wrath and bitterness.

📖 1 Peter 3:8-9. **Q.** Peter tells us to be *of one mind* to have *compassion one of another* to *love as brethren* to be *piti-ful* and to *be courteous*. **Q.** According to verse 9, how can we maintain these right attitudes?

Jesus told us how to handle offenses in Matt 5:39. He indicates that “turning the other cheek” is the same as “resist-evil”. Sometimes a meek and humble spirit is the best resistance against division in the church.

Longsuffering

Longsuffering speaks of being long tempered, patient, and having endurance through negative circumstances. Especially when dealing with others.

Paul told Timothy to preach and encourage *with all longsuffering*. In 1 Corinthians 13 we see that longsuffering is a characteristic of love. Romans 2:4 tells us that God is longsuffering toward us. To be longsuffering is to be patient and gracious with others even in the face of their shortcomings, immaturity and sin. It is enduring humility, enduring meekness and enduring love even when our flesh tempts us to give up on others.

Forbearance

Forbearance is even more intense than longsuffering. It literally means to *put up with* one another. It is loving in the midst of other’s imperfections, faults, annoyances *even when it is taxing on us*.

Love and Peace

All of the above must be done in the context of *love* and with the desire of maintaining *peace*.

📖 Rom 12:10. **Q.** How does Paul tell us we should feel toward one another?

📖 Rom 14:19. **Q.** What does Paul tell us we should pursue? (follow after). What will these things also be good for?

God hates discord in the church. He has placed us all into one body by one baptism of the Spirit with one Lord, one God and one Father of all. He has provided everything we need for continual oneness but, because we still exist in our mortal, sin-prone bodies we must always *endeavour* to keep unity and to resist division. The best way for the church to function in continual unity is for it’s members to be in a continual state of spiritual growth, consistently exhibiting the character qualities of Christ and employing the tools for unity which God has left us. When a church functions this way, they can *with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. (Rom 15:6)