

## Church Unity

### Introduction

People of God, In October we will be having our Fall Theology Conference. And our speaker for this year will be Pastor Kyle Lammott from Exodus Church CREC in Wichita, KS. The theme of our Fall Theology Conference is Church Unity.

In order to get you thinking about this extremely important topic, I decided to take a break from my series in 1 Samuel to touch upon some of issues regarding Church Unity.

Our first sermon today will address what our Unity in the Church consists of.

Next week's sermon will be about what causes Disunity in the Body.

And the week after that we will then conclude with a sermon about How to maintain the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.

Why do we need a sermon series, and even a whole conference on this topic of Church Unity? Because the health and witness of Christ's Church depend on it. Unity in the Church is not a peripheral matter. It's central to the Church's identity, mission, and glory. Because the Church

is the New Creation, let me give you 8 quick reasons why Church Unity is such an important topic:

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## 1. Because Christ Prayed for It

In His high priestly prayer (John 17:20–23), Jesus prayed not just for individual holiness, but for *unity* among believers—"that they may all be one... so that the world may believe." If unity within the Church was one of Christ's dying prayer requests, it must be one of the living priorities of His Church.

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## 2. Because the Gospel Creates a Unified People

Christ prayed that God would make us one, and the Father answered that prayer through the Gospel. The gospel creates *one new man* out of the sundry peoples of the earth (Eph. 2:14–16), a people from various tribes, tongues, races, nations, and cultures (Rev. 7:9) are all joined together by one Spirit into one body (1 Cor. 12:13), to the Praise of God's glory and grace.

Now, there are no diversity quotas for each congregation, and it doesn't even really matter. The differences we have

in our own personalities and interests, along with our own native sins have proven more than enough capable to split even the most racially and ethnically homogeneous churches. To neglect church unity and to promote disunity is to deny, and to work against, what Christ had sought to accomplish in His death, resurrection, ascension, and the sending of the Holy Spirit.

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### **3. Because the Church Is Constantly Threatened by Division**

I don't know if you figured this out yet, but we are *sinners* and therefore prone to pride, envy, quarrels, fights, and factions. Every epistle of Paul practically screams this. A disunified church is not a hypothetical threat—it's the default if we do not guard against it with all vigilance (Eph. 4:3).

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### **4. Because Disunity Undermines Our Witness to the World**

When the Church is divided, the world is confused about God. Just this past week, after my Uncle Ben's funeral, a cousin asked me—with sincerity and confusion—“Which

*church is the right one?”* It was an honest question, and a revealing one.

Jesus said that our unity would show the world that He was sent by the Father (John 17:21). But a fractured Church sends the opposite message—that Christ is divided, that the gospel has no real power to reconcile, and that the Church is just another place for pride and hypocrisy. God forbid.

But when believers stand firm in one Spirit, striving side by side for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27), overlooking offenses, forgiving one another, and refusing to quarrel over lesser things, we display something different. Our unity becomes a living witness to the world—that Christ is Lord, that grace is real, and that sinners truly can be reconciled. Our unity is not just for our peace. It’s for the world’s salvation.

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## 5. Because Unity Must Be Taught and Fought For

Unity doesn’t just happen. The law of entropy states that matter naturally moves from order to disorder. Things do not naturally organize themselves into orderliness. The Holy Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters and brought order out of the chaotic sea in the beginning. And in the New Creation the Holy Spirit brings unity out of the

chaotic sea of mankind from every nation, when the Word of God is spoken over us.

The Church therefore must be continually taught to pursue unity and reject the chaos and divisions which our sinful and fallen natures naturally want to fall into. Unity therefore is the fruit of doctrine, discipline, and diligent love. As Paul told the Corinthians, “there must be no divisions among you” (1 Cor. 1:10). You cannot call men to unity if you never teach them what it is, what threatens it, and how to preserve it.

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## 6. Because False Unity Is a Real Danger

Many Christians today are united, but they are united against Christ and His Word. Many Christians are more afraid of offending the sensibilities of women of both sexes than dishonoring God. There’s a kind of unity that really is nothing but worldliness. Ecclesiastical tyranny masquerades as niceness. There really is a iron fist underneath the velvet glove of tolerance. It tolerates major errors and crushes those who speak the truth against it. It calls divisive those who strive for the truth and uses decorum as a tool to silence godly men who tell inconvenient and uncomfortable truths. The Church

needs to speak the truth in love and be united chiefly in the truth, for the sake of the Lord of glory.

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## 7. Because the Church Is the Household of God, Not a Social Club

We are not just individuals who happen to agree on some hobby or interest—we are members of one another (Rom. 12:5). The Church is a family, a living temple of the Spirit of God, and the very Body of Jesus Christ. Disunity doesn't just create hard feelings between people—it *profanes and desecrates the Holy House of God. If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.* 1 Cor. 3:17. So it is absolutely necessary that we get this right, and none of us, through our own stubbornness, pride, and sin contribute to Disunity in the Church.

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## 8. Because Preaching on Church Unity is a Timely Word for a Fragmented Church and a Culture Afflicted with Ressentiment

We live in a time of deep cultural fracture. The unity of the Church is under pressure not only from external forces

but also from internal contagions—chief among them is what the philosopher Nietzsche once called *ressentiment*.

*Ressentiment* is more than bitterness; it is a settled spirit of resentment that arises from perceived powerlessness.

Rather than confronting personal pain with faith, patience, courage, and forgiveness, it turns outward in blame. It seeks a scapegoat. It creates a moral framework that justifies hostility toward others—especially toward those we tell ourselves are to blame for our miserable estate.

Ressentiment is everywhere.

We see it across racial lines, generational gaps, economic classes, and political loyalties. Everyone has someone to blame for the problems of the world. It's the Democrats. It's the Republicans. It's the blacks. It's the whites. It's the immigrants. It's the Jews. It's the Boomers. It's the rich. The spirit of the age trains people to point the finger before ever looking in the mirror.

Remember, G.K. Chesterton in response to the question, “What is wrong with the world?” responded saying, “I am.” And that should be sufficient for the Christian in his or her daily life to reflect on. Fix yourself, and stop focusing on others as the source of your misery in the world. Take

the plank out of your own eye, before you presume to take the speck out of someone else's eye.

**So those are just some of the reasons why we need to talk about Church Unity.**

### **The Divine Foundation of Church Unity**

Next, we need to discuss What is the unity of the Church built upon?

It is built on Jesus Christ.

*The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord;  
She is His new creation by water and the Word.  
From heav'n He came and sought her to be His holy bride;  
With His own blood He bought her, and for her life He died.*

*Elect from every nation, Yet one o'er all the earth  
Her charter of salvation: One Lord, one faith, one birth.  
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,  
And to one hope she presses, with every grace endued.*

The Church exists as God's new creation in the world—made up of people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation—born again by the water of baptism and the Word of Christ. He forgives us by His death, raises us to newness

of life by His resurrection, and feeds and sustains us in this life with His body and blood, giving us His Spirit to press on toward everlasting glory.

This shared faith, salvation, sacramental life, and future hope is the deep bond that unites all Christians. And because of this high calling, we must resist making the Church a battlefield over secondary matters. We must not allow divisions over non-essentials to eclipse our common inheritance.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us, on the basis of our union in the one body of Christ, the one Spirit we share in, the one hope to which God is bringing us all, and the one Lord, the one faith, and the one baptism, and the one God and Father of us all, that we ought preserve and strive, and maintain Church unity:

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism,<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1–6)*

This unity is expressed in shared doctrine, liturgical and sacramental fellowship, and a holy way of life. After the Spirit fell on Pentecost, the early Church...

*“... continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)*

Yet their unity went even deeper than doctrine, worship, and a common way of life.

*“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” (Acts 4:32)*

Christ gave His disciples a new command—to love one another, as Christ had loved them, so that the world might know they belong to Him.

When people are similar to you, and you share many cultural assumptions and practices, this is not the most difficult command in the world. Sure, our regular personalities can get in the way, but we tend to be able to get used to it.

But the Church expanded and Gentiles were grafted in, tensions rose between the Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is actually the context in which Deacons were elected, to solve the problem of the Greek widows being left out of the daily distribution.

Later on, some Jewish Christians insisted the Gentiles adopt certain practices of the Mosaic law, including circumcision, in order to be considered fully members of God's people, and considered to be truly justified. But Paul opposed this fiercely:

*"If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."*

To add anything to faith in Christ as the foundation of our unity is to preach another gospel—which brings a curse, not communion.

The Apostles therefore labored to preserve unity amidst incredible diversity—ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and moral. But that diversity had to be bound by something stronger than mere tolerance. **It had to be grounded in Christ Himself.**

*Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. Gal. 5:2*

But the problem of various divisions was more widespread than just circumcision.

Paul had to rebuke the Corinthians, saying:

*I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you,*

*but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. <sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." <sup>13</sup>Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Corinthians 1:10-13)*

And again, he had to tell the Philippians:

*So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:1-5)*

And from there he urged them to look to Christ as the example of how strive for unity of heart and mind, how he became a servant to all.

True unity in the Church, people of God, is a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, but one that we need to give ourselves to. We cannot grieve the Holy Spirit by who we have all been sealed for the day of redemption. Unity in

the Church is an extension of the communion of love of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. Thus the Spirit, sent down to us on Pentecost, and in our baptisms, and continually on us by faith, flows from Christ, the head of the Church down to His Body, uniting us to himself in greater glory.

This was Christ prayed for us in his High Priestly prayer:

<sup>20</sup> “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20–23)

Church unity is for the Church’s future glory and the world’s salvation. It is not optional. It is essential. Christ died and rose to create one new humanity in Himself. Christ is the head, and we are the body. And our growth in love with one another flows from Him.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, <sup>16</sup> from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is

*equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.* Eph. 4:15-16

## **The Bonds That Hold the Church Together: Faith, Hope, and Love**

Now if we could simplify what it is that holds the Church together through trials, divisions, and the wear of daily life, I would say that it is the enduring presence of divine grace working through **faith, hope, and love**. This is the threefold cord that does not easily break.

Paul writes in **1 Corinthians 13:13**, “*So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*”

Let us consider each in turn.

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### **I. Faith – Our Shared Confession and Foundation**

Paul says in **Ephesians 4:5**, “*One Lord, one faith, one baptism.*”

Faith is not merely belief in general, nor is it mere doctrinal conformity. Faith is allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ—confidence in His gospel, obedience to His Word, and reliance on His grace. Faith is the God-given trust that

binds us to Christ and, by extension, to one another. Faith is the basis of our salvation, justification, sanctification, and future glorification.

The Church is unified faith in Christ - not by common hobbies, generational tastes, or cultural preferences—but by a *common confession* – *Christ is Lord*. We are not a loose collection of spiritual consumers. We are a people bound together by one revealed faith, once for all delivered to the saints.

But let us be clear: While this faith cannot be minimized to mere doctrinal conformity, Neither can doctrinal conformity be dismissed entirely. False doctrine is a real threat to this unity. Heresy does not merely divide opinions—it destroys the foundation of our union, because it is an assault against the Lord Jesus and His truth. When we diminish doctrinal clarity or tolerate major error in the name of unity, we do not preserve the unity Church—we betray her. As Jude exhorts us, we must “*contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.*” *Jude 3*. For it is those who teach falsehoods are the one who “*cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*” *Jude 19*

This is why creeds, confessions, and catechisms matter. They are not cold artifacts of tradition—they are the trellis upon which the vine of Christian unity grows. We must

teach the faith, guard the faith, and entrust it to the next generation. In response to false doctrines that constantly swirl about, we are commanded by Jude to not only avoid such people who sow seeds of false teaching, but he tells us this:

*“But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, <sup>21</sup>keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.*

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## II. Hope – Our Shared Destiny and Direction

The second foundation upon which Church unity exists is Hope. Hope is not wishful thinking. It is confident expectation of future glory rooted in God’s promises. **Hebrews 10:23** says, “*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*”

Hope gives the Church a shared *telos*, a common direction and destination. We are going somewhere together. We are pilgrims bound for the Celestial City. The hope of the resurrection, the return of Christ, and the restoration of all things, and our future glorious inheritance keeps us pressing forward in hope together.

Like what C.S. Lewis said in The Weight of Glory.

**Every person you meet is an eternal being, headed either for unimaginable glory or unspeakable ruin—and you are helping them toward one of those destinations or the other. There are no ordinary people; every encounter carries eternal weight of glory.**

But when the hope of glory fades to the background, because we forget where we are going, and we forget what we are being made into, Church Unity erodes. A church that loses sight of the beatific vision becomes so short-sighted that she cannot see. She begins to quarrel over small, petty things. She becomes anxious, worldly, and fragile. Without hope, without vision, the people perish, and drift away in despair and bitterness.

So we must lift our eyes to the hills of eternity, from there comes our help. We must always be looking to Christ in You, the hope of glory. We must set out hearts on the blood-bought promises of Glory that are ours in Christ. Christ is coming, and we will reign with Him in glory. Maranatha!

And our hope for future glory and honor, and immortality should give us the strength to likewise overlook a multitude of sins, to bear with one another in patience,

and to walk in humility with one another, keeping the peace and unity of the Church, because of who the other person is in Jesus Christ.

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### III. Love – Our Shared Practice and Power

Finally, the one thing that binds all things together is love. Paul tells us in **Colossians 3:14**, “*Above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*”

Jesus told us that there is no greater love than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends. Love is the visible fruit of faith and the sustaining power of hope. Love is the glue that holds the Church together. Doctrinal agreement is essential. Common destination is vital. But without love, both can become cold, lifeless, and merely academic. Loveless orthodoxy is Pharisaical. Sentimental unity without truth is Liberalism. But love shaped by the cross—this is what enables us to bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, endure all things. Love never fails.

#### Walking Together in Faith, Hope, and Love

As the apostle says, “*So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*” (1 Corinthians 13:13)

And why is love the greatest? Because it brings to fulfillment what faith and hope begin. Faith believes in Christ, but sees in a glass darkly. And one day faith will become sight and we will have no need for faith anymore.

Hope looks ahead to the glory to come. But one day hope will be fulfilled at the resurrection. So these two, faith and hope will pass away. But love, love will remain forever, for God is love.

So then, beloved, what does this mean for us?

**Guard the Faith.** Hold fast to the truth of the gospel. Do not be tossed about by every wind of doctrine or by the waves of peoples posts on X. Know what you believe, and cling to the Word of God with courage and conviction, and be willing to love and be patient with those with whom you disagree. For our fellowship in together in the Church is based on our One Faith, not our earthly opinions.

**Hold Fast Your Hope.** Set your eyes on things to come. Christ is risen, Christ is reigning, and Christ is returning. Our unity is not just backward-looking to a shared past—it is forward-looking toward a glorious future. We are headed somewhere together. One day, the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and every tear will be wiped away. So

do not despair. Do not grow weary in doing good. Hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. Encourage one another with these words. Speak often of the resurrection. Long for the kingdom to come. Let the hope of glory anchor your soul—and draw you closer to your brothers and sisters who share that same blessed hope.

**Practice Love.** Let love be genuine among you. Bear one another's burdens. Forgive as you have been forgiven. Serve one another. Build up the body in word and deed, in patience and in truth. This kind of love requires humility. It requires a readiness to overlook offenses, to believe the best, and to seek reconciliation when things go wrong. Love doesn't assume motives. Love doesn't keep score. Love doesn't pick sides in tribal battles, but prays for all parties that there would be peace. Love builds the Church—it doesn't tear it down.

So let us walk together in faith, hope, and love. And as we do, may our unity shine brightly in a dark and divided world, so that all men may know that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, because of our love for one another. Amen.