

Unity in Christ – Part 1

In the Kingdom of God the last subject that we covered was Freedom in Christ; and I spoke of freedom before unity for a reason as I'll explain as we go forward today. So the subject today is beginning, probably a two-part series on Unity in Christ. We know that God is love and we know that love is a passion for oneness. Oneness is unity—it's the definition of unity. Thus, unity is the fulfillment of love. Viewed that way, unity is the whole point of the Bible and in particular of the New Testament; because we're told without love, everything is nothing. But love being a passion for oneness, then the goal of love is unity itself. Unity is the goal of the Christian life; but it's not just any unity. The unity is to be in Christ. We know from the tower of Babel discussion that when men purposed to build a tower unto Heaven to make a name for themselves, they were in unity for a goal of making a name for themselves; but that is not the unity that's talked about in the Bible as our goal. The Lord then said We have to scatter them because they have learned that they can accomplish whatever they purpose in life. So unity in any goal can bring about the achievement of that goal. But it's not just unity. Al Qaeda was in unity to bring down the World Trade Center; but that's not the unity that's the goal of the Bible. It is the unity in Christ.

Susan will read for us our core Scripture today from John 17:17-23 – Sanctify them in the truth; Thy Word is truth. As Thou didst send Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes, I sanctify Myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word that they may all be one, even as Thou Father art in Me and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that Thou didst send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one just as We are one. I in them and Thou in Me that they may be perfected in unity, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me and doest love them even as Thou doest love Me.

So the Trinity is in unity. We're to be in that same kind of unity with God and with each other through Jesus Christ. That Scripture tells us that we are to become one with God where no part of ourselves is kept outside of Himself. And that's how we're to become one with each other. It's only meaningful if it's done in Jesus Christ. So, if Susan and I in our marriage, if I am A, she is B and Christ is C, if A is becoming one with C and B is becoming one with C, then A and B are obligatorily becoming one with each other. So we don't seek oneness with each other; we seek to become one with Christ and then oneness with each other will occur.

So last time we spoke of our freedom in Christ. Unity can be thought of as having its roots in our freedom in Christ. We're in unity when we are free in Christ as we are positionally; but we're really in unity when we're walking in the freedom for which He set us free that's described in Galatians 5:1. We are in unity when we are free from self as the basis of our interpretation and decision-making. We're in unity when we are in Christ positionally for salvation and summing all things up in Christ as a way of our Christian walk. So we are in unity in Biblical terms in the spirit realm only when Jesus is the basis and all things are summed up in Jesus. We're not in unity when all things are not summed up in Jesus; because for us as Christians, whatever is not summed up in Jesus is still being summed up in self. We're in unity because of who Jesus Christ is. We're in unity because of who we are in Christ. We're thus

unified in being free in Christ positionally; but it was for freedom that He set us free. And we're only in functional unity when we're in functional freedom—that is walking in the freedom for which He set us free. And the major part of the freedom for which He set us free is to be free of self as the basis of our lives. So we are free in Christ positionally; but we do not always walk out the freedom for which He set us free. And if we don't, then unity cannot occur. That's why I addressed freedom in Christ before addressing unity in Christ. So rather than picking easy subtopics to address this subject, to make us appear in unity, I'll relate to certain subtopics in which we in the church sometimes struggle in living out the freedom for which He set us free; because if we can be in unity on some of these subtopics, unity in most other subtopics will already have occurred.

The first has to do with the control of man. The control of man may be exercised indirectly or directly. The indirect would relate to such things as our hunger for the praise of man. As Christians we know that Jesus is the only worthy one. We seek to give Him all praise while knowing that whatever praise we give Him is less than He actually deserves. And any praise that we receive, we receive in His name and pass it on to Him. Thus we are free in Christ from the hunger for the praise of man. But we may not walk in the freedom for which He set us free. The need for the praise of others is actually a form of bondage. It is based on self and not based on Jesus. It gives power to others because it drives us to behave in a way that merits their expectation, or at least appears to meet their expectation; and thus, results in praise flowing from them to us. But that's simply a perverse way of giving glory to the other person and to yourself, but not to Jesus. That's why Jesus would tell us in John 5:44 – how can you believe when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God? So the only glory we seek is that from God and we receive it through humility. If we humble ourselves, He will exalt us. So the exalting we leave to God; any praise that we seek is to come from God; and that praise takes the form of “well done good and faithful servant.” And it's received when we deny self, take up our cross and follow Him and do everything with Him as the basis. Recall that God is the only self determined thing in all of existence. All of His value is intrinsic within Himself. The value of all other things is determined by God. Your value is determined by God, never by other people. And the hunger for the praise of man is simply assigning the other person the role of determining your value which is to have him fulfill the function which God is intended to function. Our unity is in Christ. We cannot be in unity in Christ when we are hungering for the praise of man. We are free from this hunger; but to walk in unity, we must walk in the freedom from that hunger.

An example of being under the control of men directly is civil government. I Peter 2:13 tells us – submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority. But always in Scripture, there are at least two frames of reference that have to be held in a tension state in order to walk the narrow way according to the purposes of God. The control of man including civil government has its limits. It's balanced by a competing frame of reference. Matthew 22:21 – then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. So Christians should never regard Caesar as irrelevant. We're told to submit to Caesar such things as speed limits and tax laws and so on. But we never surrender the Gospel to Caesar. Remember in the Jewish society the priest occupied both a civil function and a religious function. Acts 5:27-29 the Pharisees were saying to the apostles – We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, the name of Jesus. Then Peter and the apostles

answered and said – we must obey God rather than men. That same chapter in verse 40 – And after calling the apostles in they flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus. Two verses later – And every day in the temple and from house to house they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. We are free in Christ to obey Caesar in the things that are Caesar's. We are free in Christ to disobey Caesar in the things that are God's. But we are never free to disobey God. So our unity in Christ is exercised this way and understanding these two competing frames of reference toward the control of man as exercised through civil authority.

Another direct aspect of the control of man relates to church leadership. On the one extreme is positional authority in the church that is implemented through authoritarianism. That, of course, is wrong. I Peter 5:1-3 basically says – I exhort the elders among you (the leaders of the church in other words) shepherd the flock among you but not by lording it over those allotted to your charge. Our common response when we run into authoritarianism in the form of church leadership is to adopt extremism of another form that is equally wrong. Our usual response to authoritarianism is to run to the other extreme of autonomy. That's simply every man doing what's right in his own eyes and no one is going to tell me what to do. That, of course, results in chaos in the kingdom of God and in the church of Christ. And according to I Corinthians 14:33 God is not a God of confusion. But in between the two extremes and the two competing frames of reference is the sweet spot, the narrow way. But that narrow way is walked out only when all principles are functioning in what I call true accountability. Remember no one can hold someone accountable. True accountability results from humility and a passion for the truth. That's what we impose upon ourselves to be driven by humility and surrendering to the things of God with a passion for the truth, motivated by love with a goal of oneness in Christ to His glory.

We are free in Christ, but that freedom in Christ is never exercised as authoritarianism. We are free in Christ, but that freedom in Christ is never exercised as autonomy. The freedom for which He set us free is to be mutually accountable with true accountability driven by humility and a passion for the truth and recognizing Jesus as the truth. That is part of being a member of the body of Christ. No one is to play solitaire in the Kingdom of God and no one is to appoint him head of the church and try to take the headship of Jesus Christ. Church leadership is simply part of that process. That is our unity in Christ. If in leadership we never have a need to resort to authoritarianism, if not in leadership, we never have a need to display and declare our autonomy. When living free in Christ in the freedom for which He set us free, free from self and free from pride, then we're all driven by humility and all driven by a passion for the truth and have no need for authoritarianism and no need for autonomy; because both of those are rooted in the flesh and not rooted in Jesus Christ. And the flesh is to die while Christ is to live in us. I live, yet not I, but Christ within me. So where you see authoritarianism and you see autonomy, you're seeing people who are not operating in Jesus Christ. So as a church we are in unity when we know these things and submit to these things. We never submit to authoritarianism, but we never submit to autonomy; because they're both rooted in self which is the basis of the flesh and will never lead to unity. The one will lead to bitterness and the other will lead to chaos.

The next poster addresses the subject of judging. On this, I've divided it into four categories: Judge not the unbeliever; judge not the believer; and judge the unbeliever; and judge the believer. Recall that we're so leery of authoritarianism that we have a tendency to run to the

opposite unhealthy extreme—namely autonomy. We have a similar tendency with the subject of judging. Matthew 7:1 – Do not judge lest you be judged. Since this is the most quoted Scripture, then this is the Scripture that we have to come to grips with. The reason is that our response to this Scripture also drives us to two related, equally unhealthy extremes. The first one is to frighten us away from ever addressing sin in the life of a fellow believer. The second one is for us to use it as a defensive weapon and a defensive posture with which to attack those who try to address sin in the life of another believer, in particular our own. But we need not get so completely hung up on words in the English language that we miss the key spiritual truth. The key spiritual truth is, there is good judging and there's bad judging. We're to avoid the one and seek the other. We're free of the bad one and called to do the good one as an act of obedience. But we need to know which is which as part of our freedom in Christ and to come to the unity which is to be ours in the body of Christ. But we have to do that by applying Psalms 119:160 – the sum of Thy word is truth. Because anytime we take one verse and attach ultimate value to the one verse and throw out the rest of the Bible, we're going to be on thin ice; because with multiple competing frames of reference to walk the narrow way in the Kingdom of God, we will forfeit one frame of reference in order to magnify another frame of reference.

So let's begin by the word judgment. One definition according to Webster is the power of arriving at a correct decision; discretion; discernment. Already we can begin to see an overlapping of judging and discerning in the English language. I Thessalonians 5:21 – But examine everything carefully and hold fast to that which is good. Well that verse is calling for discernment. We cannot hold onto what is good without judging what is bad and tossing out the bad. Hebrews 5:14 – but solid food is for the mature who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil. Here we see that a mark of a mature Christian is the ability to discern good and evil and pursue the good and get rid of the evil. John 7:24 – Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment. There is a righteous judgment. I Corinthians 5:5 – I've decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. This is Paul describing what could be viewed as the outcome of church discipline resulting from righteous judgment addressing consistent unrepentant behavior. But making someone an outcast, of course, is to be the last resort, not the first resort in the body of Christ.

So what is the proper order that we're to go to? Well begin by looking at category 2-B which addresses judging of the believer. The first principle is Matthew 7:3-5 where it basically tells us to take the log out of our own eye. Examine yourself first before approaching your brother. Then and only then do you move on to the next flow in the chart. Matthew 18:15-17 – And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses, every fact may be confirmed. And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax gatherer. That means to regard him as an outcast as Paul previously described. So clearly we're told to judge not and we're told to judge. And we have to understand the paradox and then operate in both frames of reference.

Now look at category 1-A addressing judge not the unbeliever. So let's state the obvious about that situation. None of us were worthy to be saved. All of us were saved by grace. So there is

no point in a believer looking at an unbeliever and judging someone's human righteousness as compared to another person's human righteousness. There's little to be gained from being the best sinner in Hell. Apart from Jesus, levels of human righteousness are irrelevant and worthless because all our righteousness even is as filthy rags before a Holy God. Since we're all saved by grace, then we're to regard all unbelievers with grace, meaning that we regard them as equal to ourselves meaning equally unworthy of having been saved. Thus, we're never to judge an unbeliever as being unworthy of our presence or unworthy of hearing the Gospel. The blood of Jesus covers their sins just as well as ours. We're never to think of ourselves as better than them; we're to think of ourselves as better off than them. And we're better off than them because we have been saved by grace through faith, not of works, not of ourselves that any man should boast. So the unbeliever who is veiled is simply who we were; and thus, our present reminder of the grace of God for us. So we never judge an unbeliever as being unworthy of our presence or unworthy of the Gospel being heard through us as an earthen vessel. Paul addresses that point in I Corinthians 5:9 – I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world or with the covetous and swindlers or with idolaters for then you would have to go out of the world. He continues in verse 12 – for what have I to do with judging outsiders? Paul is stating the obvious. If you're going to interact with the world, you will necessarily be in the continuous company of filthy sinners. You judge correctly that they are sinners, but you do not avoid them. You don't exercise judgmentalism in judging them to be unworthy of your presence or unworthy of hearing the Gospel. You judge them as being sinners and equally worthy of hearing the Gospel as you were when you heard it. They will judge your God by how firmly you judge them in your judgmentalism while declaring your self righteousness. Our only judgment is that all need Jesus. That should take care of the attitude that a believer has toward unbelievers.

So let's press on to look at the subject of the judging of believers. That is a fellow saint, your brothers and sisters in Christ by going back to category 2-B. Paul continues writing in I Corinthians 5:9 – I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with immoral people. We already know because we just looked at it that he did not mean with immoral unbelieving people. So just who did he mean not to associate with? I Corinthians 5:11-13 – But actually I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he should be an immoral person or covetous or an idolater or reviler or drunkard or a swindler. Not even eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church? But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves. So clearly we're called to judge those within the church and that means to confront sin in the church. So how do we confront sin in a godly way in the church? Just recall the following. Where there is no confrontation, there is no resolution. And where there is no resolution, there is continued deterioration; because sin is expansive. An unopposed sin in the church will be expansive. It will fulfill Isaiah 56:12 – Tomorrow will be like today, only more so. So a brother in the church who is in an adulterous relationship is not going to quit committing adultery because the believers leave him alone. He has to be confronted with it. We must know the truth that discipline in the church is to be an act of love. Proverbs 3:12 – For whom the Lord loves He reproves even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. And we're the earthen vessels of God. That's how we're to function. Revelation 3:19 Jesus says – Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. Our fallen natures resist that. Our fallen natures seek autonomy. Pride resists discipline. Humility seeks it with a heart of true accountability. Pride takes offense. Humility

takes correction. Pride knows that it has no blind spot because if it did he could see it himself and knows if it had one, no one else would be spiritually gifted enough to identify it and deal with it. Humility knows that it has blind spots and seeks others to speak into the blind spots. Pride makes excuses; humility makes adjustments. Pride believes in its own knowledge of its own heart. Humility knows because God said it, that the heart is deceitful above all things. Pride is the self image of self when self is the basis for all interpretation and decision making. That's the flesh. Humility is the self image of self when Jesus is the basis of all interpretation and decision making. That's the Spirit. Humility seeks to know two things: To know the heart of Christ and then to know its own heart in the light of the heart of Christ. In the body of Christ, feedback from others is simply how that is accomplished. We all see dimly; but we don't all see dimly to the same degree about the same subjects. Unconfronted sin in the church weakens the evangelism of the church. Unconfronted sin in the church is the major testimony to the world of the hypocrisy of the church. Is that not the most frequent criticism you hear? I wouldn't go to church because it's full of hypocrites. They say the world is hypocritical; the church is hypocritical, so why should I go to your church? Why should I believe in your God; because I can be hypocritical without going to your God just as well as you can?

So, so far, we know that in regard to unbelievers we judge them correctly as being sinners; but never judge them as being unworthy of your presence or unworthy of hearing the Gospel. We know that we're to judge in the church. We are called to do it in so far as discerning good and evil. We're to confront evil. An unrepentant saint may well require discipline. That discipline could conceivably require pursuit to the point of ostracism. That sounds severe to us; but it is all Scriptural. Unconfronted sin in the church is a major impediment to the evangelism of the church. All of those are reasons why I Peter 4:17 says – for it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God. That's because we have more light. We've been given much; therefore, we are more accountable for much. And our behaviors expressed to the world will reveal one of two things. Either there's something divine in us or we're driven by a drive to selfishness, in a drive to pride, and a drive to hypocrisy, and a drive to no accountability, and a drive to autonomy just like the world is. And that, of course, gives no testimony of Jesus. The care we need to exercise is the following: When we give someone in the church a piece of our mind, we are to ensure before the Lord, beforehand, that we're giving out the mind of Christ that is within us according to I Corinthians 2:16 and not simply giving out a piece of our unrenewed mind; because unity is to be in Christ and unity will never occur flowing out of an unrenewed mind. Competing unrenewed minds can never be in unity, at least the unity as described as the goal of the Bible. So with what attitude should judgment be performed in the family of God? Well the obvious bottom line answer is the attitude of love. Where there is no love, discipline will simply be authoritarian and controlling and legalistic as it fulfills the flesh of the one performing the judgment. That is self righteousness and that is what we are not to do in judging the believer.

So how do we guarantee that it is done in love? We never rely only on ourselves because we are subject to the same frailty. Proverbs 11:14 in the King James Version – Where no counsel is, the people fall; but in the multitude of counselors, there is safety. That principle of Proverbs 11:14 is the principle of the safeguard given in the flow of Matthew 18. We go with one, then with two or three and then the whole church. In that there is safety against authoritarianism, there is safety against legalism, and there's safety against self righteousness. That's to ensure that it is done in love and not simply to fulfill a desire to control by one or a few in the church. So if it's done in

love, what is love seeking? Remember when we talked about love? Love is a passion for oneness. God has a passion to be one with me. When I say I love God, it means that I have a passion that I be one with God. When I say that I love my brother or sister in the church, it is to say that I have a passion that you become one with God. So discipline and judgment are always to be done driven by that motivation; that is with a redemptive purpose to bring that person into oneness with Jesus Christ Himself. To fulfill the abundant life for him and the testimony to the world to the unbelievers of how we can deal with things in love in the church with a redemptive purpose and never with authoritarianism, never with self righteousness, never with legalism, always done to the glory of God, not to the glory of the one exercising the judgment. And the person receiving it is to receive it as if from the Lord Himself, with the church speaking in love, speaking the truth in grace, into the blind spot to apply a corrective mechanism that the brother or sister heretofore has been incapable of recognizing and incapable of correcting left to their own devices. It is never love to speak the truth without grace and it is never grace to speak without truth. But it is the merger of those two principles; because the greatest truth is to dispense grace and the greatest grace is to speak truth. So you can distinguish but not separate truth and grace. And it's with the combination of those two frames of reference that you address discipline and correction within the church.

So this gives us a running start about judging. Judge not and judge. And balancing the two frames of reference and how to address the frame of reference to the unbeliever and to the believer. And we'll pick it up next time as we go forward looking for the unity in Christ to fulfill the purposes of Christ. So thank you for listening.