

Unity in Christ – Part 2

We're in the Kingdom of God, and actually ya'll may be stunned to hear, we're finishing up the Kingdom of God as a broad subject today. We're in Unity in Christ as a topic and that's only two parts, today being the second and last part. Last time as we were exploring the subject of unity, we dealt with some issues that people have to come to grips with to be unified; and that is our attitude toward the control of man, both indirect and direct. Then we looked into the attitude of judging. We explored judge not and judge, the unbeliever and the believer, with a proper attitude and orientation so that we keep that subject clear in our minds. And we learned, of course, that as all things in Christianity, whatever is done is to be done in love. And so what does love seek? Love (I'll remind you) is a passion for oneness. The end of love is to glorify God. And since God is love, then we don't glorify Him except whatever we do be done motivated by love and with a goal of that which love would desire. And simply stated, the love is to fulfill the purposes of Jesus Christ, to seek and to save that which was lost, to destroy the works of the devil which opposes the purpose of Jesus Christ, and to usher in the more abundant life for believers. These purposes are worth being reminded of from time to time for this reason. If our judgment of a believer is not to fulfill ushering in the abundant life for them, then it is misguided. If our judgment of an unbeliever is not to seek and to save that which was lost, then our judging is misguided. Love in a believer toward an unbeliever is to have that unbeliever become a believer. Love in a believer expressed toward another believer is to have that other believer experience the fullness of the more abundant life that is accessed by coming into oneness with Jesus Christ. Judging in a believer is never about control other than as expressed in II Corinthians 5:14 where it says – the love of Christ controls us. Love is always oriented toward oneness with Jesus Christ.

That's why sin must be confronted because persistent sin interferes with functional oneness with Jesus Christ. Persistent sin can preclude the accessing of the abundant life. Persistent sin loses rewards in Heaven. Persistent sin weakens our testimony and weakens the testimony of the church. Persistent sin precludes unity in the church. Persistent sin brings no glory to Jesus Christ. Where there is not fullness of the abundant life, there is not fullness of evangelism; because the nonverbal evangelism, by the testimony of the abundant life, is the most powerful testimony available. The abundant life is rooted in love and is recognized by others when love is evident. John 13:35 Jesus says – By this all men will know that you are My disciples. How? If you have love for one another. So one of the greatest testimonies to the world is to see hypocrisy confronted in a loving manner, with a redemptive purpose, done with humility and received with humility in the church as all in the church are united to glorify Jesus as the head of the church and to grow into His very likeness to bring Him maximum glory. When we don't fulfill our judging that way in the church, or of unbelievers outside the church, then we're short-circuiting all of those powerful testimonies to the world. So we're in unity in the church when we do these things and this is what love does. When we love, when we know when to judge, who to judge, and how to judge them, and with what purpose; then we can function in unity in the church. We need to always remind ourselves of the gold standard of all spiritual pursuit as Christians. And this includes the gold standard for all our judging of believers and unbelievers. It is to be whatever brings me and others closer faster into oneness with Jesus Christ.

The next subject we'll look at in regard to unity in Jesus Christ is the subject of offense; because we can never be in unity when we take offense. We must mature in Christ beyond taking offense. There are two aspects to this. The first is taking offense at God and we do that in one of two ways. The first is to determine that God is not here and He ought to be. And the second is to determine that God is here but He's misbehaving. He's not doing what I think He ought to be doing. Of course, whenever we see a God failure, we are really seeing a pride success. That is, of course, to be repented of and that was the point that God made ultimately to Job in Job 40:8 when He asked Job, will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified? Can you imagine an omniscient Being having a created being condemning the omniscient Being so that the created being can appear to be right and the omniscient Being appear to be wrong? Taking offense at God is to judge God and will interfere with the flow of blessings including the abundant life. Jesus said in Luke 7:23 – and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me. The one who is offended at God is not regarding God as holy and is not honoring God as God and will not access maximum blessing. We are free in Christ from taking offense at God. We are so free that we can continue to choose to take offense at God. But we can't have it both ways. We can't continually take offense at God and access the abundant life provided through Jesus Christ simultaneously. When we do take offense at God, we are producing dead works, we're producing dead testimony, and we're producing death to the abundant life. We can never bear witness of a faithful God by charging Him with unfaithfulness as we take offense at Him. So we are in unity in the church, in Christ when we know that we are never to judge God by taking offense at God. And we're lovingly confronted if we do it; because love desires maximal blessings to flow to another and wisdom knows that taking offense at God will preclude blessings, not maximize blessings. That's why love must confront; because love cannot stand to see another miss out on the blessings of God. But in our defensiveness, which is rooted in self, we tend to label confrontation as self righteousness on the part of the one confronting, when in fact it may very well be the expression of love itself. When you judge the one who loves you, then you will continue to miss the blessings of God. And it works with both polarities. When you take offense at God, you will take offense at others and when you are taking offense at others, you are in some way taking offense at God.

That takes us into the second type of offense and that is toward others. I Corinthians 13:5-6 (the love chapter) – love does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, rejoices not in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. So the key to not taking offense is, simply stated, to love. Because love does not behave undiplomatically, it doesn't seek her own advantage over another, it's not easily provoked, it doesn't presume evil on the part of another, and it always rejoices with the truth. Why should we not take offense at others? When we look at the various possibilities of why someone is saying something to us, there are three broad possibilities. The first is the person is occupied by diffuse evil which is impersonal. That person may express evil in one way or another toward all people or most people. So if something is impersonal evil, there's no reason to take it personally because it's not personal. It is simply flowing in an impersonal way.

Secondly, if a person is taking exception to something within you and you look at first the log in your own eye and you notice that, hey, what they are charging me with is, in fact, ungodly, then of course the proper action on your part is repentance, not protest and not offense. If someone is charging you with something that is, in fact, godly, then that person offending you is really

rejecting Jesus Christ in you and not rejecting you. As Jesus said, they reject Me, they will reject you when you come in My name. So the correct response is never to take offense because you're either dealing with diffuse evil, something Christlike in you in which they're taking offense at Christ or something un-Christlike in you in which you should repent and not take offense. The proper response is always (again simply stated) pray, model, teach. Those are the three major categories of what you can do as a Christian when someone else is adopting some behavior that would give you reason to take offense. When you take offense, you effectively shut off your ability to meaningfully pray, model and teach. So if taking offense precludes the effective demonstration (nonverbal and verbal) of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then should you not refuse to take offense so that you can pray for them with pure motives, model for them a Christlike response, and teach them as they have ears to hear?

Taking offense is always rooted in self. As a Christian, whenever we take offense at God, we're always operating out of the basis of self in the realm called the flesh and thus judging God. No matter what goes on in your life, God always is, He always is present, He always is love, and He always operates in your best eternal interest and to His maximal eternal glory. As a church, unity occurs when we're united in that perspective. And that sets us free individually from ever taking offense at our holy, loving God and allows us in love to then confront anyone in the church who is taking offense at God and holding a skewed view of this holy God Whom we claim to worship. As a Christian, whenever we take offense at another, we're (again) always operating out of the basis of self, thus in the flesh, seeking our own interest while not being controlled by love, and to our own glory, not the glory of God. When we see something that is potentially offensive, we need to check our hearts and see if we aren't dealing with either diffuse, impersonal evil, or something directed at me that is ungodly which calls for my repentance or something directed at me which is in fact godly in myself in which case they're rejecting Jesus Himself and not rejecting me. Unity does not exist when offense is taken at God or at others. Unity does not exist when we're not motivated by the passion for ourselves and others to be one with Jesus Christ. And unity does not exist if we are not lovingly confronted when we do take offense at God or others.

The next major subject is disunity in doctrine. Now I'm going to speak for myself on these selected issues; and of course, not as a representative of any church or any denomination. I only ask in regard to the points that I pick that you simply give meditation to them. But the specific points aren't the subject for today. The subject that I'm addressing right now is Unity in Christ, separating out essential from nonessential doctrines. There are some doctrines which are absolutely essential to the whole Christian faith. They cannot be compromised without gutting the Christian faith itself. Unity cannot occur in me with those who differ on those particular points. We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Jesus Christ is both the Son of man and the Son of God. He left the glory of Heaven, came to Earth as a man, lived a sinless life, and died voluntarily on the cross to pay the debt for my sins. He was resurrected, He ascended and He sits at the right hand of the Father. All that I have in God is accessed through Jesus Christ. There is salvation in no one other. No offense, but if you agree with those, I'm in unity with you or headed toward unity. If you disagree with those, we can never be in unity until you change your mind. I love you. I want to bless you. I pray for you. I will witness to you as you allow me opportunity; but I cannot be in unity with you. I will divide from you over those issues. They can't be compromised without sacrificing the Gospel of Jesus Christ itself.

But there are also nonessential doctrines. These are issues over which I may disagree with you; but I will not divide from you. You may divide from me; but I will not divide from you. Testimonially speaking, I once faced such issues in the formative stages of a new church. One issue was over tithing as a doctrine in the New Testament church. No one in our church was opposed to tithing as a practice. No one was opposed to tithing as a discipline. The difference was about standing on tithing as a formal doctrine of the church. Some believed that we should stand on it as a doctrine. Others believed that our attitude was that of Psalms 24:1 – the Earth is the Lord's and all it contains, including all that dwell therein. They believed that the principle was love which would lead to cheerful giving while viewing our role as stewardship, not ownership, of God's resources that had been put in our hands during life on Earth. Some left the new church primarily over that particular issue. They left us; we didn't leave them. We would have welcomed them back and joyfully so. In our hearts we remained in unity, in Christ, in the fundamental essential doctrines of the faith, even as we differed over a doctrine not considered essential for our salvation. I Corinthians 10:31 says – Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Our unity remained the following in Christ. They had tithing as a doctrine to the glory of God. We did not have tithing as a doctrine to the glory of God. They left to the glory of God; we stayed to the glory of God. We blessed them where they relocated to the glory of God. We would have welcomed back the whole group at any moment to the glory of God. Disagreement over a doctrine such as that does not have to mean division in the body of Christ. Departure does not even have to mean division in the body of Christ at least in regard to our unity in the global body of Jesus Christ.

Another such issue had to do with the age of creation. I don't need to explain to this group that many Christians believe that creation is approximately 6,000 years old based on Biblical genealogies. Others believe that Biblical genealogies have skips in them just for historical reasons and they don't give an accurate date to the day of creation of the universe. And that date is placed approximately 16 billion years ago as determined by scientific methodology. All agree that eventually the Bible and science have to agree since God created that which science studies and God created the Bible. So ultimately, they cannot disagree; but during this period of time, it's not essential in our salvation in order to hold one particular doctrine over the other. I was in the minority, actually a minority of one in the formative stages of that church who believed in the 16 billion year figure and thought that the days in Genesis were long epochs of time and not meant to be 24 hour interpretation. The majority, and overwhelmingly so, believed in the young earth hypothesis of 6,000 years ago. For a time, in the formative stages, I thought I would be excluded from participation in the church based on that particular issue. But here's how we handled it. After much discussion, it was agreed upon that a member of the church would have to have the following attitude. It would either agree with the statement of faith, including the statement of the young Earth hypothesis, or if he disagreed, then he would honor the statement of faith. And what was communicated about honoring the statement of faith is that I could state my perspective, but I was always to include the majority view of the church so that I wasn't simply manipulating someone by giving my opinion and making people think that it was the church's opinion and that I would not impugn the motives nor thought process of the others. Well that satisfied me; I thought it was handled beautifully. That was considered a nonessential doctrine about the Gospel of Jesus Christ that we should not divide over. We were unified in the following. The underlying principle that lies beneath that debate is the sovereignty of God. I

will divide over the sovereignty of God; but I will not divide over the date of creation of the heavens and the Earth. We agreed that creation occurred whenever God willed it, in exactly the way He wanted it, to appear in any way He desired, and took Him exactly as long as He wanted it to take. That is the sovereignty of God and we were in total unity on that particular issue. So we remained in unity on the sovereignty of God instead of insisting on unity on certain interpretations of what that might mean. The sovereignty of God simply transcended units of time. We refused to let units of time divide us as we walked by faith in the God Who transcended time and created time in the first place. Simply put, we thought we had bigger fish to fry—namely the Gospel of salvation to a world that needs it as opposed to constantly dividing into smaller and smaller groups over issues that were not essential to that message of salvation.

So as Christians, at any local fellowship, we are united in our essence; we are born again; we are a new creation; we are born of the Spirit of God; we're indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. We're united in value. Our value comes entirely from this Holy God Who created us and then saved us through His grace. And that God is not a respecter of persons. We're united in purpose which is to bring glory maximally to God. We do that by summing up all things in Jesus in our personal lives and all things in Jesus in our relational lives. We're united in position. We are children of God. We are citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. There is Jesus, the head, and there's the rest of us. So any title above brother is more appropriate for Christ than it is for any of the others, other than as a functional church position; but not as a heart attitude of superiority of one Christian over another. We're united in critical doctrines that are absolutely essential. We're united even in our attitude toward non-critical doctrines. We're all seeking the face of God and the closer we get to Him, the more doctrinal differences are going to disappear. The closer we get to the face of God, the more language itself will lose its impact and meaning. We will all be singing holy, holy, holy in unity and unison rather than worrying about units of time when we're looking at the face of the One Who transcends time. And rather than fussing over percentages, when we're seeing Him as our All in All, percentages will be reduced to irrelevance. We will all claim nothing when we're looking at the face of God. That is the pathway we're on. So tolerating non-essential differences now should be a small step for those who know when they're looking at the face of God in unity that all these differences are going to dissipate into nothingness. That is our Unity in Christ.

That's what love does. Colossians 3:14 – And beyond all these things put on love which is the perfect bond of unity. Key point—unity does not occur when we seek unity—never has and never will. Unity occurs when we seek Jesus Christ and sum all things up in Him including love whose fulfillment is unity. Love, remember, is a passion for oneness. I had to go through this progressive revelation to come to the point of where I function now of understanding love as a passion for oneness. God loves us! He has a passion that no part of ourselves remain outside of Himself. He wants no part of an unrenewed mind that's not renewed to the mind of Christ. When we know how He feels about us, that's when we know the love of God. And we know love because He delivered Himself up for us. So it's the testimony of God through His Son Jesus Christ, through the horror of the cross, to pay the price for all sins of all men for all time. That is the testimony of the love of God. And when we know that, we fulfill I John 4:19 – then we love because He first loved us. I can't conjure up love. But when I receive the revelation of Who this God is and how He loves me, oh, I begin to love this God Who loves me that way. We now have a passion that no part of ourselves remain outside of Himself. And then we don't stop

because oh, I love my neighbor as myself; because I know the love that my God has for my neighbor and I have a passion that no part of my neighbor remain outside of his Savior. I have a passion that this person know the love of my God. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts per Romans 5:5. Now we love what He loves, including ourselves, and we love others as we love ourselves. When we understand all that is when we understand love as a passion for oneness with our God, reflecting the passion for oneness that He has for us. That's when you want the best for someone. So when you talk in terms of love being the greater good, it's a meaningless statement unless you can define what the greater good is. But when you define love as a passion for oneness, you now know what the greater good is. It's that that person come into total oneness with their creator God Jesus Christ. The only thing of intrinsic value in all of existence is God Himself.

So we do not aim for unity, reach unity, and then develop love. Unity can never precede love because unity is a product of love. Where love of God and love of others exist among a community of believers, then unity will obligatorily follow. The two can be distinguished but can't really be separated. But unity is always a corollary to love. Love is never a corollary to unity. And this is sometimes I think a misguided purpose of those who set unity as a goal and don't have the fulfillment of the love of God for them and for others as a goal, and recognize that how can unity in Christ occur if you're not all becoming one with Christ? So we commonly hear people say, we don't want church as usual. Well, there's one remedy for that. It is not open microphone or closed microphone during the church service because they've both been tried. It's not musical form or musical duration; for all have been tried. It's not preaching style; for all styles have been tried. It's not presence or absence of gifts of the Spirit because they've long been evidenced, at least in certain locales. It's not the authority structure because all variations have been tried. The remedy for not wanting church as usual, is for us to be transformed from glory to glory into the image of Jesus Christ by receiving the revelation of His love and then reciprocating that love in response to Him.

John 12:32 – And I (this is Jesus) if I be lifted up from the Earth, will draw all men to Myself. There are historical points about that. Certainly it speaks of His crucifixion as He was lifted up. That's finished. It can speak in part of His ascension from Earth to Heaven. That's historical and finished. But it can also address the issue of what is lacking. And that is our lifting Him up by summing up all things in Him in our personal and relational lives. That is unfinished. So we lift Him up in our music and that's worth something. We lift Him up in our preaching and that's worth something. But when we lift Him up by denying self, taking up our cross and following Him to the point of transformation into His likeness to fulfill His love for us and our love for Him, oh, that becomes worth everything. That is to lift Him up. And when we do that, all men will be drawn to Him because they will know who I am because of how you love. And when they see us lifting Him up in all things, in all ways, in all thoughts, in all behaviors, and in all relationships, what more powerful testimony that there is divinity within us can we possibly offer the world? That is to have His kingdom occur on Earth. And I'm not speaking of the millennial kingdom; I'm speaking of the Kingdom of Heaven where the operational principles that are operating in Heaven right now are brought to planet Earth through us as earthen vessels. That's what love does and that what loves brings about, unity. And that love never fails. In some way you can think of it that that's what this journey to the cross was all about. That's what the cross itself was all about and that's what the Kingdom of God discussion have all been about; because

doing that and only that will fulfill all of these and fully glorify God. Because you see our whole point is to do certain things that can be distinguished but not separated. And when we try to focus on one instead of the several, we invariably magnify a part of what we're to do, and to the exclusion of others. What I'm describing here is what will bring God maximal glory, bring God maximal pleasure, bring maximal testimony to the world, bring maximal abundant life to me, and bring maximal eternal rewards in Heaven to me. Not one of those things, but all of those things in simultaneity, but they only occur at all when love is the motivation. And that love is revealed by our God on the cross of Christ. That love, I know, because Who He is and how He delivered Himself up for me and what He went through. I then love because I see that He first loved me. And I then love as He loved including others and we want everything to be summed up in Jesus which is what oneness is. And any unity other than by that mechanism will be a unity by a system of man and not unity by divine power; because love is that divine power and that's what God's goal is. If we do this, we will be in unity in the only unity that is true unity and that is unity in Jesus Christ.

So my time is up and I thank you for listening.