

Not Without You - Part 1: The Commitment to Unity

by Carter Conlon

Carter Conlon emphasizes the vital importance of unity and love within the church as a reflection of Christ's teachings and a source of divine blessing.

Duration: 28:46

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 17:21, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 11:12-13, Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 4:3

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of unity within the body of Christ. They highlight that the church cannot afford to be divided and must be an example of unity to the world. The speaker compares the superficial unity seen in the world to the true biblical unity that comes from walking together in God's grace. They reference Acts 2, where the early believers were in one accord and one place, unified with God and with one another. The speaker also reminds the audience that each member of the body of Christ has a unique role and purpose, and that God has placed them exactly where they are for His glory. The sermon concludes with a plea for the church to fight against division and to strive for unity, so that no one is left behind and all can stand together before the throne of God.

Transcript

Now, Father, I thank you with all my heart, God, for your word, which is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. I pray, God, for the anointing of heaven to speak to this congregation as their pastor. As you have led me, Lord, over these years, help me to be a vessel through whom you can lead them.

To the things that you've taught me, to the things that I've learned to embrace. God Almighty, I see something in the scriptures, I see it, God, it's so deep, it's so far beyond us. But Lord, if you're going to bring this church into focus throughout the world, something has to happen here, deeper than we've known.

So God, give us the grace, give us the grace to let you lead us. Give me the grace to speak the truth you put upon my heart, and even more so, give me the grace to live it. And I thank you for it, in Jesus' name.

Psalms 133, we're going to start there, and then from there, we're going to 1 Corinthians 11, 12, and 13. I'm not going to be reading all of those chapters. I'm just simply going to drop on some truths in them.

Psalm 133, David the King says, behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Thank God. It feels pleasant here today, doesn't it? We worship together, we all shout the same name, Jesus, into the heavens.

We clap our hands together, we reach out, we rub shoulders with the persons on our left and on our right, which might be difficult for some, but we're going to get to that. When we dwell together in unity, now that's a true unity, a biblical unity, a God-appointed unity, it is like the precious oil upon the head running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down to the edge of his garment. So unity brings God's people into a place of separation from this world, a place where we are identified as the people of God.

Jesus himself said it this way, by this, all men shall know that you are my disciples, that you have love one for another. In other words, something is flowing through you to each other as the body of Christ that can't be produced by anything in this world. The world can fake it.

They can go to a concert and everybody can sway and they can lift up their cell phones, turn on the light and pretend that they're all in unity, but they're not. There's a separation. There's something of God that comes upon a people who declare or make the choice to walk together in true biblical unity.

It's like the dew of Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion. In other words, there's a thirst that is satisfied, not just in you and I, but there's a thirst everywhere we go that is satisfied because we have made the choice to let God do something in us to draw us together that only he can do. Lastly, and most important to my heart, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

When God's people walked together in unity, remember Acts 2, they were all in one accord and in one place. They were unified with God, unified with one another, not in strength, but in weakness. They knew they needed God.

They knew they needed each other. Suddenly the door opens and out they go into the marketplace overturning in a sense the whole known world of their day and right down to our day together. When we walk together in unity, when I walk in unity with you and you walk in unity with me, God himself commands the blessing of eternal life.

Thank God for that. I mean that with all my heart. Thank God for that commanded blessing of eternal life.

Now we've entitled this series, Not Without You. That's where it gets difficult. My journey began as a young believer in Christ.

I was a cop when I got saved. I was 24 years of age when I got saved. I remember going into this church.

I was about two years a Christian and this man, an old man about my age now actually, comes walking up to me and he gives me a full embrace, a hug. Now I'm not into hugging at this point in my life. I don't like it.

It makes my skin crawl. I'll tell you straight out. I just don't like it.

He hugs me then stands back from me and looks at me and says, I love you. I want you to know I love you. So I just stared at him.

I didn't say a word, nothing. I stared. Pastor Teresa said to me, why didn't you tell him you loved him back? I said, I don't even like the guy.

Why would I tell him I love him? I love the Lord. I love being a Christian. I love knowing my sins are washed away, but this is some old guy in the church and I am a young cop and we got nothing in common.

I just don't even like the guy. I don't necessarily want to be around him, but yet he would make a point of singling me out almost every week. He would come and hug me and he would say, I love you.

I would stare back at him. I just could not play the game. Thank God that there are people here who can't play the game because if you're going to know the victory, it starts with honesty.

I couldn't fake it. I wasn't to fake it. I wasn't willing to reciprocate and say, I love him.

You, if I don't forget that, I'm not going to do it. This has to be real. And so I remember one day we're at a dinner, a church dinner, and he comes up to the, comes up to the, my chair and hugs me again.

And he says, I love you. I want you to, I love you. And then he stands back and he says, you can't say that back to me.

Can you? And I just looked at him. He says, but you will one day, you will one day. And his words came true.

His words came true. God started to do something in my heart because I started to get into the Bible and I started to, I started to want the truth. Now I didn't just love people overnight.

People were a source of pain in my life. I used to have to run out of rooms before I got saved. You understand? Like there was nothing about people that I found admirable.

It's ironic that I'm here, isn't it? I mean, standing where I am today, but I got into the word of God and I, my heart, I said, I don't want to be a person that just studies this and knows it. It's supposed to be truth. This is supposed to set me free.

According to what you said, Jesus, I'm supposed to be a new creation in Christ. The old things in my life are supposed to pass away and all things are supposed to become new. So I started studying the Bible that way.

And you know, the old things don't pass away like quickly. You know, my, my first attempts at embrace in the church of Jesus, when somebody hugged me, it was like a seal. You ever had one of those seal, you know, you hug somebody and suddenly their arms become 80 inches long and they do this kind of thing.

It's like a seal flipper hug. I call it, you know, you, you can't really embrace them, but you give the seal flipper thing. You, some of you still do that.

I bet you'd still do that right now. You just, you can't reach out and just embrace somebody unconditionally, but it's at least a start. You know, for some, it's, it's a huge, you know, for people here that have been hurt, you've been wounded, you've been abused, you've been bruised, you've been lied about.

Uh, and, and people have been a source of pain. It's, it's a miracle for you to even be here today, this close to other people. But what if I suggested to you today that God wants to take it farther.

He wants to do something deeper. And he says, just, if you are just willing, if you're just willing, remember in the old Testament, he said, if you're willing and obedient, you will eat the good of the land. If you're just

willing the victory that I won for you on the cross can become yours.

The freedom that I promised you, you can have, I'll take you through this Valley of the shadow of death. I'll take you through the dips of your fears. I'll take you through the floods and the fire, everything that tries to tell your poor heart that this could never be part of your life.

I'll take you through into a place of abundance. I'll take you through where there's an anointing that separates you from other people around you. I'll take you through to where your life becomes a source of satisfying the thirst of people around you.

And I'll bring you to a place where I command eternal life to be extended through you to people all around you. Now I want you to go to first Corinthians chapter 11. Remember we're talking about not without you, not without you.

I'm not willing to make the journey that God has given to my life without you. And Paul in first Corinthians 11 first talks about the seriousness of unity. There's a serious side to unity.

Now in verse 18, the first Corinthians 11, he says, first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I, in part, I believe it for there must also be factions among you that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Now this is an incredible statement.

Paul says there are going to be those who tried to divide the body of Christ and they, they will be there. But what will happen is that they, it will become evident who really belongs to God. They have, they're crossing bridges.

They're not destroying them. They're crossing bridges for deeper and more intimate fellowship with Christ and with his church. He says, therefore, when you come together in one place, it's not to eat the Lord's supper.

In other words, this Corinthian group of believers, we're gathering together as we do today as a banquet, may I say before the Lord, a feasting time, a time of celebration, a time of worship, a time of thanksgiving in the presence of God. He said, but in eating, one takes his own supper ahead of others. And one is hungry and another is drunk.

In other words, there's something going on in your midst, Paul says that isn't good. Verse 23, he says, for I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night of which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, take, eat.

This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Now, Paul is contrasting the selfishness of the Corinthian fellowship where people are coming together and they're gathering around ethnicity.

They're gathering around preferences. They're gathering around the people, maybe that make them comfortable. And they're pushing away to the sides of the temple, people who make them uncomfortable.

And Paul says, this is not what the worship of God is supposed to look like when you come together. He says, I want you to remember the Lord Jesus took this bread. And he said, this is my body, which is broken for you do this in remembrance of me.

This is the fellowship. Paul says that Christ is looking for in his church. I am here for you.

My, I will, I will put my own needs secondary to yours. I will help ask God for the help to get away from myself, focus about me and my problems and my rent and my apartment, my relationships. And I'm going to look around the room and say, is there anybody that I can allow myself and my agenda to be broken for, for their sake, do this.

Paul says in the same manner, he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. In other words, the willingness, Paul is contrasting the selfishness of the Corinthian church with the willingness of Christ to be broken and poured out for the sake of other people.

And he says in verse 26, as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. In other words, there's a power in that proclamation. There there's a, there's a power when the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ is looking away from self-focus and looking to the needs of one another in truth, sincerely doing so.

I'm not talking about everybody running around with 50 bucks in their hand, looking for somebody to give it to. I'm talking about a word to somebody who's discouraged, who might need it. I'm talking about inviting somebody for a cup of coffee who looks lonely.

I'm talking about just the willingness to have the, your plans of the day broken, to be able to be poured out for the sake of somebody else. And Paul says, if you do this, you become a proclamation of the son of God who came to this earth and poured his life out for the sake of others. He did not come for his own benefit.

He came for ours. Now it gets interesting. Now this is the, I talked about the seriousness of unity.

Therefore, whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Now, now keep in mind, a lot of people use this and quote this when they're talking about people coming in who have sin in their life and they partake of the communion table. Now, I suppose it can have some application in that way, but that's not the context of what Paul is speaking.

He's talking about the context of being given to one another in the body of Christ as Christ was for us. Then verse 28, he says, let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. Coming to the communion table, partaking of the promise of the one who was given for us in totality, broken body, spilled blood, not realizing that we are called into a fellowship that looks like that with one another, failing to understand what it means to be part of the Lord's body, his church.

For this reason, verse 30, many are weak and sick among you and many sleep for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. This is the seriousness of being committed to one another in the body of Christ. For this reason, for this reason, many are, may I put it this way? May I paraphrase it? For this reason, many are spiritually weak.

Others are spiritually sick and some have fallen asleep among you because it's a failure to discern the body. There's no such a thing as just me and God in the church of Jesus Christ. No, we are grafted into a body.

There's a seriousness to what happens to my life when I interact with you. I want the truth to go down real deep inside. The casual interaction with the body of Christ is a good thing to a point, but it's the call of the Lord is into something deeper.

This is where that blessing of unity that he speaks about in Psalm 133 begins to command life. When people begin to see it, maybe online, may I put it that way? Suddenly there's a stirring in the heart to say whoever their God is, is God. I want that Christ in my life, that Jesus that they were singing about, that Jesus that we saw a young girl dancing about, that Jesus that musicians were playing about.

I want that Jesus in my life because I see something among the people of God that is stirring something in my heart that I know that I need. First Corinthians 12, beginning at verse 12. Now we have to learn not just to tolerate each other, but to esteem one another.

That's a hard transition. A lot of people just settle with toleration. What if we were really honest on Sunday morning? Can you imagine? I tolerate you brother.

I tolerate you sister. I'm glad to see you this morning. Thank God you're not coming to my house.

No, for real. If we were just real, can you imagine if we could only speak the absolute truth for one day? What would actually be said? We couldn't masquerade what's really going on in the heart, but we're called to more than just tolerating one another, but we're actually called to esteem one another. Chapter 12, verse 12 says, for as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that body being many are one body.

So also is Christ. Verse 13, for by one spirit, we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, we've all been made to drink into one spirit. In other words, there's one church, Paul says, and there's people from different cultures.

There's people from different backgrounds, people from different socioeconomic states, people who are known, people who are not known for. In fact, the body is not one member, but many verse 14, verse 15. If the foot should say, because I'm not the hand, I'm not of the body.

Is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I'm not of the body. Is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole we're hearing where would be the spelling, but now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just as it pleased him. Isn't it amazing.

You are exactly where God wants you to be. He set you where you are to be what you are, to do what you do, to glorify him in the unique way that only you can. You are not a happenstance.

You are exactly where God wants you to be. Praise be to God. And if everybody was the same, verse 19, if all were one member, where would the body be? But now indeed there are many members yet one body.

And here's what gets personal. The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Nor again, the head to the feet.

I have no need of you. No, much rather those members of the body would seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable on these, we bestow

greater honor and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty.

In other words, everybody, everybody is a value in the kingdom of God. There are no big people. There are no little people.

There are no talented people. There are no untalented people. Everybody is placed in the body of Christ as God has seen fit.

And everyone has value. Everyone has an incredible inestimable worth in the sight of all mighty God. And you and I have got to get that mental perspective when we're greeting people.

So we're not always trying to press through the crowd to whatever big shots happen to be in the room, passing by people that Christ has placed in the body to whom we should be giving honor. We should take time to stop and talk to them, whether or not they have in our estimation, something grand to offer the kingdom of God, or whether they look like a marginal player. They are not that way in the sight of God.

We've got to learn that. We've got to learn to take time. We've got to learn to talk to people.

We've got to learn to esteem people. As a matter of fact, the Bible says, esteem every man greater than yourself, every woman better than yourself, put yourself in the lowest seat and look at the body of Christ from that perspective, no matter what kind of an officer position you might hold. God composed the body verse 24, giving greater honor to that part, which lacks it, that there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another.

And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it. And if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. And so look, it's, it's a huge undertaking, undertaking this blessing of unity, this commitment to unity, the seriousness of unity, learning to esteem one another.

And lastly, in first Corinthians chapter 13, of course, Paul is still on the same theme in these chapters in the Bible. It's the glue, may I call it this, that holds it all together. Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love I'm become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge. And though I have all faith so that I could remove mountains, but have not love. I am nothing.

Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor. And though I give my body to be burned, but have not loved it profits me nothing. Love suffers long.

It is kind. Love does not envy. Love does not parade itself is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own.

In other words, it's not living for its own benefit. Is not provoked, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity. Love does not run around looking for faults in other people and an opportunity to broadcast it everywhere they travel.

Love rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

Everything else will fail, but love never fails. And so in my heart, as a, as a man of God, not just as your pastor, I've made a determination in my heart. I'm going home.

I'm going to heaven, but not without you. Not without the young, not without the old, not without the educated, not without the uneducated, not without those who I feel comfortable with. And those who are diamond polishers, may I put it that way.

We're all diamonds in the rough. And there are certain people in the body that just polished the diamonds. That's what their job is.

They, they rub you the wrong way constantly. And there's something of God that has to go beyond convenience to where I look at every person in this church. And I say, I'm, I'm not going without you.

I'm not content just to get there. Are we saying that today that when I stand before Jesus, will I, will I fall on my face? Will I shout? Will I dance? What's it going to be like? I don't know what it's going to be like, but I don't want you not to be there with me. I don't want to make this journey without you.

And that's got to be the heart of the church. It's got to be the heart of this church. And if it's not the heart of this church, then we ought to take that thing off our marquee that says the church that love is building.

Then that's false advertising in this city. If love is not building this church, we should take it down and put something else up there that might be more appropriate. But I choose to believe as your pastor that love is building this church.

I choose to believe that with all my heart. I believe the heart of God is being formed in this church. I believe that we are being stretched.

We are being led by the spirit of God. God is asking for something a little deeper than everything we've ever known before. He's asking us to go together as a body, the young and the old and the rich and the poor, every race, every nationality, every language, every color, one body in Jesus Christ, one body walking together in unity, one body in New York city.

Everyone else might be divided. Everyone else might be hoping the rest of society around them suffers the judgments that are coming on this generation, but not in this church, not here, not among these people. We are all in this together by God's grace.

And I'm not going without you and you're not going without me. We're going together into the kingdom of God. By God's grace, the Holy spirit will come upon us by God's grace.

People will come in from around the world and look at a congregation of people from 104 nations that truly love one another. It's not a farce. It's not a fake.

It's not a program. It's not done for the cameras on Sunday morning, but it's in truth that love is here. Jesus could have stayed in heaven and fully enjoyed it and rightfully done so forever.

He didn't have to come here, but in his heart, he said, I'm not going to enjoy eternity without you, not without you. He didn't have to come and get us, but the love in the heart of God forced him in a sense to break through the canopy of eternity into time. He, where he walked among us, endured our frailties and went to a cross.

And Paul said, this is the Christ I presented to you. This is how we have to learn to interact with one another. And only God can do this.

I don't know when it happened in my life. I was in a radio interview with a lady in Minnesota who's well-known on the radio, Christian radio. And I was on my cell phone and she said, pastor, I've read your book.

She said, it's amazing. The stories are amazing. What God's done around the world, the outreaches, you've spoken to governments, you've seen civil war come to an end.

And she just went on and on about all of this stuff. And she said, but tell our listening audience on the radio, what is the greatest miracle of all that you've seen in your life over the years? And I, without hesitation, I said, the greatest miracle of all is that I love people. You know, she started to cry.

On the other end, she said, I never ever would have thought that would be your answer. With all these things that have been happening and all these wondrous things that you could have spoken about. And you said the greatest miracle.

I said, because it is the greatest miracle. If you knew me before I got saved, you'd understand what I'm talking about. If you knew the journey, how difficult it's been, but I really do love people.

I mean, it's not a fake. I don't fake it. I do.

It's just there. It's something God put in, but on my part, it was just a willingness to take the journey. And you know, in this last hour of time, we're going to have to get together with some folks, Lord, God help us.

We're going to have to understand not everybody in the church does everything the same. The church world is quite different. We have opposing viewpoints on some things, but if we can, if we can find common ground at the cross, if we can, if we can come back to that ground, where salvation is by God's grace through faith in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, then I can take the hand of any man or any woman anywhere in the body of Christ and say, you're my brother.

You're my sister. Let's go together. I'm not going to take this journey without you.

You don't have to believe everything I do. I told some pastors recently, I was in a conference with pastors. I said, well, I'm not, I refuse to be divided with you over inconsequential doctrines.

I mean, things that are not essential to eternal life. I said, if you believe that we're going to go through the tribulation, if you believe that the church of Jesus Christ is going to be carried through the tribulation and have to suffer all the plagues and stuff like that in the Bible, I said, I'm okay with that. I said, the only thing I ask of you is feed my dog because I won't be here.

Unity is more important than being in agreement on every little single point of doctrine. You understand it's more important. We've got a big fight ahead of us.

We've got a big fight for our country, for our culture, for our children, for our families. We've got a huge fight ahead of us. And we're, we're not in a position, a luxury of being in a place where we don't need the whole body of Christ.

And we have been given by God an opportunity to be an example of that in this generation, because a lot of people are tuning in here to see what the church could look like in the future. So by God's grace, by God's grace, may we be taken beyond just knowing these things that I just read you things that we've all read before. We've, we've all known, but maybe by, by the spirit of God, may we be taken beyond the

things that we just read in the Bible and may it become reality in each of our hearts.

Oh God, help us as a people, not to fall into the trap of division, thinking somehow that's holy. God help us to understand the fight that we now have on our hands. Oh God, help us to go together as a group.

All of us. I want every one of you to be at the throne of God with me one day. Do you understand that every one of you want nobody here missing on camera as well at home, wherever you are watching us in all of our annexes and all of our campus churches, don't you find yourself left behind because you refused.

Don't find yourself weak and sickly in spirit because you refused to let truth govern your life. We're going, we're going together. Hallelujah.

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