

The Beauty and Power of Unity

by Denny Kenaston

Denny Kenaston emphasizes the critical importance of unity in the church as a source of strength and resilience against division and evil.

Duration: 1:21:56

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1, Ephesians 4:3-6

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the challenges and responsibilities faced by the congregation. He acknowledges that the load and responsibility of serving can cause the fire in their hearts to wane. The speaker encourages the congregation to have willing hearts and to blend in with the church community. He emphasizes the importance of unity and love among believers, using scriptures from Ephesians and Psalm 133. The sermon concludes with a reminder to walk worthy of the calling and to strive for unity in the bond of peace.

Transcript

Hello, this is Brother Denny. Welcome to Charity Ministries. Our desire is that your life would be blessed and changed by this message.

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These messages are offered to all without charge by the freewill offerings of God's people. A special thank you to all who support this ministry. In the name of the Lord Jesus this morning, it's been a real blessing to be here already.

I feel like we have gotten enough to take home with us already in this service. A couple things I wanted to share this morning before I get into the message. I was thinking a bit earlier this morning, and I thought maybe I was a bit hard on you last night.

I know I said some strong things, but I was also pondering this morning a cycle that I notice in the life of a church and also in the life of believers, of men of God. You know, I've noticed it in my own life. You seek

God.

You seek God out of a sincere heart, of wanting to be right with Him, of wanting to be under His blessings, of wanting Him to use you. You seek God. And as you seek God, as you draw near to God, God draws near to you.

It works like that. But as God draws near to you and lays His hand upon you, then God begins to use you. And as God begins to use you, you find yourself at times overwhelmed with all the things, with all the voices, with all the cries, with all the work that needs to be done.

And in that beautiful place of blessing that you cried out to God for, there stands a danger of getting so busy with all those cries and all those needs that that fire that was burning in your heart, that caused all those things to come your way, it begins to wane. And then I thought, you know, it's the same way with the church. You know, a church can get serious with God and seek the face of God and want to be in the right place and come with the right motives and seek God for His blessing.

And you know, just like when a man or a woman breaks their heart before God, God comes near to them, so also with the congregation. When a congregation breaks their heart before God, God comes near to that congregation and as the congregation cleanses their heart before the Lord, God begins to send people into that congregation. But then the same thing can happen.

All of a sudden you find yourself overwhelmed with so many things to do and so many needs and so many crying hearts and so many places to go that if you're not careful, that fire which was burning in the heart of the congregation, it begins to wane with all the load and responsibility. And I want to acknowledge that this morning. I felt like I was just a bit hard on you last night.

And I know you have the right hearts and you heard my words and you responded rightly to it. But I also think that there's some of what I just explained here this morning going on in this place. And I just want to encourage you but challenge you.

That's one of the greatest challenges of a minister's life, to keep that thing in its right balance, to keep the fire burning, but to be able to meet all the needs that come your way. So may God give you grace and wisdom as a congregation. I don't know if I'll remember to say it this afternoon.

It's on my heart right now. But I do want to thank you for the invitation that you've given to me to come here and minister among you and share with you the word of God. I want to thank you for the kind offering that you gave to me.

You shared out of your own hearts and out of your own pocketbooks. And I bless you for that and I thank you in Jesus' name. May God reward you for that.

And then lastly, I looked around this morning and I saw that this room is full of people. And that means there's a lot of visitors here this morning. And my heart wants to give you, visitors, something that you came looking for this morning.

That's where I would like to go this morning. But God sent me here with a responsibility to this local congregation. And I want to continue to fulfill that responsibility.

So some of you just dropped in here on Sunday morning and you may not be able to put everything together that I'm saying today because we've been building one message at a time all week long. So you bear with me as we continue to fulfill our responsibility to this congregation this morning. You can open your Bibles now to begin with in John.

We're going to read a little bit in John chapter 17. The title of the message this morning is The Beauty and Power of Unity. The Beauty and Power of Unity.

And I want to say this this morning. This sermon this morning is preventative maintenance. I don't know that there's great disunity in this congregation.

I don't sense anything like that. I sense there's unity here. I sense that you're going on with God.

But sometimes it's good for a preacher to just give preventative maintenance, you know. If you just go along and oil things here and grease things here and add a little here and tighten a nut here and take care of this little problem over here, then everything just seems to run very much more smoothly. And that's all I have in mind this morning by this message.

It's preventative maintenance. Just to encourage you and help you to see how important it is and how gracious and wonderful it is what God has given to you. We were speaking last evening about the church at Ephesus and the beautiful ministry that that church was.

And it was the ministry of that mature body of Christ that we just reflected upon a bit last evening. And as I meditated upon that again this morning, I thought, well, there's probably nothing that brings a body of believers into that maturity, into that one man, into that mature man. Ephesians chapter 4. Nothing brings a body there quicker than unity, where the brothers and sisters draw their hearts together and begin to move and act like one man.

So my heart is thrilled over the unity that is here and my heart is also stirred over the potential, the further potential of that unity and burdened that we keep that unity, that we guard jealously over it, that we recognize how important it is that our very life as a congregation depends upon it. You know, you cannot divide something that is one. You can't do it.

I thought about the powerful union of a husband and a wife. You know, you cannot divide the powerful union of a husband and a wife. Now sure, if there's a struggle in the marriage, sometimes those things happen.

But when a husband and a wife are one in spirits, you can't touch it. In fact, you wouldn't even try. It wouldn't even enter your mind to try to divide a husband and a wife where there is a unity, where they are bound together in love.

You cannot divide something that is one. I wonder if this isn't the greatest strength that the church can have right here, is unity. Unity.

The gates of hell shall not prevail against a church that is one. The gates of hell will try to prevail. The gates of hell will do its work.

The gates of hell will try every way it can. But you cannot divide a church that is one. And we can cite many examples there in the book of Acts of how it was tried.

And I tell you, it just didn't happen. Instead, the gates of hell were on the run because of a unified church in the city of Jerusalem. Amen.

It blesses my heart, you know. I know it's just the illustrations we see in the book of Acts is just the physical leaders there in Jerusalem. But I like to think that just behind the scene, pulling back the veil, there were also evil spirits pacing the floors the same way that the Sanhedrin was, you know.

They are there pacing the floor and were wringing their fingers together and saying, what are we going to do? I mean, a notable miracle was done. What do we do? What do you think we should do, these guys? What are we going to do with them? I just like to think that the gates of hell were doing the same thing. What are we going to do? The resurrection.

Now, this power and this Holy Ghost. How are we going to stop them? And they're glued together like a magnet. How can we stop them? The gates of hell could not prevail.

And they were all in one accord, the Bible says. Powerful. Well, that's what we're going to talk about here this morning.

This little preventative maintenance. Amen? In John chapter 17 and verse 20, we read these words. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also, which shall believe on me through their word.

Brothers and sisters, that comes all the way down through the annals of history to right here in this auditorium today. That prayer has been answered. When Jesus prayed, His Father answered.

Hallelujah. This prayer is already answered. That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.

And we're going to say more about that, but look at that phrase. One in us. It's not just one.

It's one in us. Don't forget that. That the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

Look at it. It's not about you. It's about Him.

Even the unity brings glory and attention to the Lord Jesus Christ. That the world may believe that thou hast sent me. Make them one.

That's what His prayer was. And the glory which thou gavest me, I have given them that they may be one even as we are one. Look at that unity.

Powerful. I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect, mature. There's that mature man.

That they may be perfect in one and that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them as thou hast loved me. Now, Acts is an example of the answer to this prayer. But the answer to this prayer has been coming down through the annals of history for two thousand years.

And wherever there is a people who will get themselves and keep themselves in that place before God and in Christ Jesus like Brother David shared with us, this prayer and the answer to this prayer is just released and released and released upon those people. Acts is an example of the answer to that prayer. Their unity made them unmovable.

Their unity made them a mighty warrior against evil. Their unity made them, and you know this is so, a living body of Christ upon the earth. In fact, it even says that in the first couple of verses there in Acts.

That He, Jesus, through the Holy Ghost, began to do these things. Jesus was building His church. He was there through the Holy Ghost building His church.

Oh, brothers and sisters, let us seek this unity more and more that the world may know that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. Let's be jealous over what we have and not take it for granted. I want to read now in Ephesians.

Can we turn over there again? I said we're going to be in Ephesians this morning and we are in Ephesians. Chapter 4 is where we want to read. Ephesians, among many other things, Ephesians is a book of unity.

It is one of the major themes of the book of Ephesians. They were a unified body of Jesus Christ at Ephesus. They were.

It's a book of unity. You read through chapter 1 in the book of Ephesians, you'll find these words again and again. Us and we.

All through it. Us and we. Brothers and sisters, this morning, it's us and we.

It's not you. It's us and we. In the church of Jesus Christ, we share a common glorious spiritual inheritance like our brother David shared with us.

A little later on, He speaks of the church which is His body. That's a unified object. He speaks of the church as being a building fitly framed together.

Notice those words. He speaks of the whole family in heaven and in earth. What a beautiful unity.

A body fitly joined together. He uses these phrases all the way through the book of Ephesians. The powerful unity of a bride and a bridegroom.

And the powerful unity of a husband and a wife in Ephesians chapter 5. And like we mentioned last night, a warrior, a fighting warrior in Ephesians chapter 6. Ephesians is a book of unity. Before we read here in chapter 4 and verse 1, let me just give you this last thought before we read these verses. All this unity in the church at Ephesus, I want you to just, let's look at reality now.

The church at Ephesus was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles. Of two very different groups of people.

Two very different cultural backgrounds. Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were blessed with a good solid foundation of the law, of the prophets, of the revelation of a Messiah, the promise of a Messiah.

The Jews had all of that in their background. The Gentiles, they had nothing. But here we have this group of people who have been drawn together by God and who gather themselves together around a common, glorious, mysterious fellowship in Christ Jesus.

And you know, it's a little bit that way here today too, isn't it? I mean, we are quite a diverse group of people. But we have gathered ourselves together to fellowship around the glorious mysteries of Jesus

Christ our Lord. It is because of Him that we are all here.

Like one brother said to me yesterday, how can this be that an old Amishman and an old hippie can have such fellowship together? And he was saying it in a positive way. It's because of Jesus we've been drawn together to fellowship around the mystery of Jesus Christ our Lord. And that's the way it was with the church at Ephesus.

They were a unified body of believers who had been drawn together by Christ with diversity like you can't even imagine. And somehow, some way, they all dwelt together and loved one another. And God grew a mature body of believers that planted churches all around that area.

May God do the same here. Reading in verse 1 of chapter 4, I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, I beg you, says Paul, I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. And brothers and sisters, that vocation is what I've been speaking about all week long.

I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. With all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in you all. I love that verse.

One God and Father who is above all and through all and in you all. Hallelujah! Talk about common union. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And I think that's as far as we're going to read. We could read right on.

There are many, many rich things here in this chapter. But that's far enough. There's a few things that I'd like to draw out of these verses and then make some practical applications to them this morning.

First of all, looking at verse 3, I would like us to notice there is a unity that the Spirit gives. Paul says to the church at Ephesus, who is, by the way, enjoying a glorious, powerful, beautiful unity. Paul says to them, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The unity of the Spirit? The unity that the Spirit gives. That's what that's saying. There is a unity that the Spirit gives.

And while we're going to talk about unity this morning, and while we're going to look at some very practical things and ways which we, as God's people, can be jealous over that unity, we want to begin by clearly defining there is a unity that the Spirit gives. Yes, we have our responsibilities, but first and foremost, unity comes from God. Comes from God.

You study the history of revival, and you see unity. Every time you see the presence of the living God in the midst of a people, you see unity. In fact, I've been surprised at times how unimportant the little differences of doctrines become when all of a sudden the presence of the living God comes down in the midst of a community.

It doesn't matter anymore, because there is a unity that the Spirit gives, and when the power of the Spirit of God is poured out upon God's people, all of a sudden, many of the walls that stand between and divide

God's true people come tumbling down. Hallelujah! And they need to come tumbling down. And I'm not talking about ecumenicalism today.

I'm not talking about forgetting about doctrine and just fellowshiping in Jesus. But dear brothers and sisters, you know that what I'm saying is true. There are too many walls that stand up between and separate God's true people.

But I've seen it as I study the history of revival. Those walls come tumbling down because where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is a unity that the Spirit of God gives and just draws people together. So as we consider the subject of unity this morning, let us consider that first and foremost.

This unity that you have in this congregation and that unity that you desire more of, it comes by the Spirit of the living God. God gives it. God pours it out.

The second thing I'd like to do is look at the word endeavor. Here. Endeavoring to keep.

This word endeavor, it is a very active word. It means to make haste. It means to be zealous.

It means to be diligent. It means to intensely labor. Make an effort, strive for, strenuously press for the unity of the Spirit.

That's what Paul is saying to this beautiful church who is filled with unity. Paul tells them, stretch for the unity that the Spirit gives with all of your heart. It's a very active word.

Make every effort to keep the unity that the Spirit gives. And that's my encouragement to you this morning also. And the next word is the word keep.

Remember he said, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. The word keep means to watch guard over. Now remember, they had unity.

So he's not telling them to go get something. They have it. And what Paul is saying to them is, you guard over that unity with jealousy.

And that word keep means to guard like as if a soldier, maybe he's guarding the city while the people are sleeping, and there he is, walking back and forth on the wall. He's got his weapon in his hand. He's got his eyes open.

He's watching. He's alert. He's diligent.

It's his responsibility to guard the city while the people are sleeping. That's what that word keep means. Be jealous over what you have.

Many do not have it. Watch guard over it. Hold on to it.

Continue in it. Maintain its present state. That word keep is the same word as where the Scriptures say, keep His commandments.

It's a strong word. It's an active word. It's a word that comes to us as we sit here this morning to move us into activity, to wake us up maybe to the reality of what we have, to maybe shake us out of our complacency and move us out of that mode where we're just coasting along, you know.

There is no coasting in the Christian life. And there's no coasting in church. And there's not supposed to be any hitchhiking around here either.

This oneness that Jesus prayed for in John chapter 17 is a very precious thing. It's very evident when we read it there. We don't have to understand the depths of what that unity is all about, but we simply must obey and trust God.

If God makes it a top priority, then we need to do the same thing. How the enemy has done his work through this failure of this verse right here so many times. In fact, he's probably destroyed and derailed more churches over this issue right here than any other of them put together.

He watches, he waits for a little disunity, for a little place here or there, a little hole in the wall that he can go and put a wedge in there and then get the wedge in and then just pound that wedge a bit, get it a little bit further, a little bit more. Now there's a little bit over there. And over there he goes for another wedge and pound that thing in and just start breaking this thing up and moving these guys over here and getting these polarized over here about this issue.

Ah, there's a little bit over there. He pushes another wedge in over there and pounds it in there. Little by little, he disintegrates a unity that was powerful.

And soon, the testimony is gone. Soon, the community starts saying, Yeah, did you hear that? They had a split down there. Yeah, they can't get along.

Yeah, some of them went down the road, started another one. Yeah, well. Oh, God forbid! God forbid! Listen, brothers and sisters.

The way that you keep that from happening is not that you wait until you see disunity around here and then try to go and fix it. No! God says there's a preventative thing to do endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit, to rejoice in what you have, to be jealous over it, to seek God with all your heart that God would continue to pour a unity that the Spirit of God gives to the congregation. That's how you do it.

How many times the enemy has done his work through this failure right here? How many times? I'd like us to notice just briefly here seven graces that promote unity. We find them here in the text. Loneliness, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing, love, and peace, and also endeavoring.

There are seven graces that promote unity in a congregation. They're very clearly spelled out here. God, through the Apostle Paul, God has tied these graces right into the middle of this principle of unity.

There's a reason for that. These graces promote unity. Loneliness.

Loneliness of mind. With all loneliness, Paul says, oh, listen, you want unity in your congregation? Stay low to the ground. Have a lowly attitude.

That word loneliness is talking about humility. It's a proper view of me in relation to God and others. There's a good practical definition of humility.

A proper view of me in relation to God and others. That takes care of all the high-mindedness. A proper view of me in relation to God.

That'll put you in your place. Then, once you're in your place, you'll be in your place. And others.

Humility, brothers and sisters. Meekness. The word meekness, it simply means yieldedness.

A heart that gives up easy. See? See, we kind of think that's weakness. But I'm telling you, that's not weakness.

If you've got a heart that will easily bow to your brother or to your sister, you have got a precious jewel of a heart that can easily bow. That means you're in a brother's meeting and discussion's going back and forth and this and that and maybe you have some strong feelings about what you think but everybody else seems to think something else and your heart just said, Okay, brethren. Hey, I have my own thoughts about it, but if you brothers are all feeling this way, then I'm very satisfied just to go the way you guys want it to go.

Amen. And I can support it with all my heart. And then a true heart that yields at a time like that, you will see that guy in there supporting with everything he's got.

He's not going to go away hurt and just stand back and say, Well, we'll see now if it works. We'll see if I was right and they were wrong. I'm going to just stand in the back and watch a while and see if this thing falls apart.

No. Not a man who has a meek heart. He just bows his heart.

Meekness is yieldedness to God and to others. Long suffering simply means patience. Being patient with others.

It's very interesting to hear the prayers and be in the prayer room this morning and the songs and it seems that these kind of principles were coming out even in our prayers as we were praying. Long suffering means patience. If you are going to endeavor to keep the unity that the Spirit of God is pouring out upon you, you must be willing to suffer long.

And be patient. Forbearing. I want to be careful here.

We can spend all of our time on these and I just want to skim them. But forbearing. What does it mean to forbear? This is what it means basically.

It means putting up with each other. Putting up with each other. And it has the connotation of putting up with somebody and the needs they have in their life.

Amen? When you really stop and think about it, as time goes on, we get to know each other pretty well. You know? And we know that we are a bunch of needy fellas. We know it.

And God says, Forbear. Put up with him. Bear with him.

Forbear with him. I am not talking about letting him live in sin. I am not talking about that.

But you know, we are all the way we are. We all are. We have our little views, our strengths, our weaknesses.

Put up with each other, God says. Put up. Why? There is a unity that the Spirit gives.

And if you want those things to go away in your brother or in your sister, they are going to go away faster as you draw close together and unify your heart than if you start picking and like that. That doesn't do it.

Love is the word Agape.

Sacrificial attitude of care and concern for others. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit as sacrificial attitude of care and concern for others. That's love.

We looked at the word Endeavor and active pursuit of unity. And lastly, the word Peace. Peace with God and peace with one another.

And we will say more about that later. But endeavoring to keep peace with God and peace with one another. And the Bible here in this text calls that a bond or a glue.

A glue. The glue of peace. These graces are the oil that makes everyday church life flow on smoothly.

Amen? Then we move on to the next one. I'd like us just to quickly note seven doctrines that declare unity in this text. There are seven doctrines that declare unity.

And may I just remind you this morning that the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God. And God could have just as easily breathed out the word one one time. But He breathed it out seven times in this text.

There's a reason for that. And it's not there because God thinks maybe we'll forget about it, and so He said it seven times. God put that word one in there seven times because He wants to emphasize it on every one of those points that are given.

He could have just as easily said there is one body and spirit and hope and Lord and faith and baptism. But He didn't say it that way. He put one in front of every one of these beautiful doctrines in the Bible.

There is one body. Only one. I know there are probably people who wish that word said two or maybe three.

But my friend, there's only one. And I know we live in America and it's a mixed-up America. I know that.

But brothers and sisters, the Bible is still true. There's only one body. Only one true body.

May God help us. And one spirit. Only one.

One hope of your calling. We all are here this morning and we have the same hope, don't we? I mean, how many of you thrilled? My brother Craig was up here leading that. Redeemed how I love to proclaim it, you know.

Why? Because there's only one hope of His calling. Only one! And it united every one of our hearts together this morning and caused our hearts to soar heavenward. There's only one hope of His calling.

Only one. And our hearts are all surrounded around that beautiful calling this morning. One Lord, not two, not three.

Only one. One faith. One baptism.

And one God and Father of us all. Seven doctrines that declare unity and tell us, come together. Come together.

Stay together. Work to stay together. Be jealous over that which you have.

Because there's only one. Only one. This very declaration draws us together.

What are some of the practical ways that we can make every effort to keep the unity that we have? And that's the burden of my message this morning. It's just to give you some practical ways in which you, as individuals in this congregation, can do your part to guard jealously over the unity that God has given to you. Number one, through personal union and communion with God.

There's probably nothing that you could do more for the success of this congregation than to be jealous over your own relationship with God. Amen? Pretty simple. I've already said it two or three times this week.

But here we are again. If there is a unity that the Spirit gives, then I must be in the Spirit or my part of that unity is muddled. I must be in the Spirit.

I must be earnestly watching over my own heart and my life and my relationship with God. I appreciated the little emphasis this morning before we started to sing. That increased the unity of this service this morning.

Why? Because there is a unity that the Spirit gives. And if we come into this place, and sometimes you do. You come in here all fraggled and worn and bumped around all week and maybe you had a tough week and you come in here and that's okay.

If at times you come in here like that and you think, oh, I can't wait to get to church and be with the brethren. I've had a tough week and it's been hard out there. Thank God for the church.

That's okay. But if every Sunday morning you come in here that way, something is wrong. Something is wrong.

You are hitchhiking on everybody else's spiritual life and that's not right. So, this is beautiful. You know, I've heard you.

Oh, I've heard you this week. Ah, this is beautiful. I love it here.

God's doing so many beautiful things in my life. Do you? Then let's get jealous about it. The best thing that you could do to keep this congregation moving in a right path so that somebody else can also walk through the door and say, oh, it's so beautiful here, is for you to maintain that personal relationship with God.

Keeping your heart clear. Not walking in here with a fire burning in your soul on Tuesday and Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. That's the greatest thing you could do.

Your personal union and communion with God. Keep your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face.

As we are one with God, we will be drawn together as one. Amen? You know, we often tell young couples that at a wedding. You know, we tell them.

A three-fold cord is not easily broken and we'll tell them this. Here you are, husband. Here you are, wife.

And here's God right up here. The more you draw close to God, the closer you're going to get together. You will find yourself getting closer and closer and closer together as you draw closer and closer to God.

We tell them that in a marriage ceremony. But brothers and sisters, it works the same way right here. The more you draw close to God, the more you will be drawn close to your brothers and sisters.

So, even if you're having a struggle and you're not exactly sure about this place and you're wondering what's going on around here, instead of just picking everything apart first off, why don't you spend three days alone with the Lord? And fast and pray. And draw close to God. And see if you don't also draw closer to your brothers and sisters when you show up on Sunday morning and you realize, Oh, I love my brothers.

I love my sisters. I'm glad to be here. Because, by the way, you have something precious here.

As we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we also grow in unity with each other in our fellowship. Listen to this and consider. I wonder how many church splits, if you could just really pull back all the secret things that took place behind the scene.

I wonder how many church splits could be traced back to this first point right here. People started moving in the flesh. And another one.

And another one wasn't where they ought to be. And another one. Pretty soon those other ones start getting together.

You know how birds of a feather are. And all of a sudden there's a bit of a disunity here. I don't like this.

I wonder how many times you could track it back to they lost the fire. They lost the fire. Number two.

How can I endeavor to keep the unity that the Spirit gives? By praying effectual fervent prayers. Because the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man or a righteous woman availeth much, and the effectual fervent prayers of righteous men and women avail even much more. But I would just like to focus for a minute on praying for this unity that God has given you.

And make that a burden and a prayer before God. That you jealously pray over that thing. That you comb through that Scripture there in John 17.

That prayer that Jesus prayed. And you pray those words before the Lord and say, God, in Jesus' name, please keep the unity that we have in this place. Because I'm telling you there are many places that they do not have it.

Many places. And what happens is you can get distracted on many other things. And all of a sudden months turn into years.

And two or three years went by where there's a little trouble here. And a little trouble here. And a little trouble here.

And when you put two or three years on top of that little trouble here and there, you've got big trouble coming down the way. But rather do some preventative maintenance. And when you're in there on your knees, as I've seen you so faithfully all this week, when you're in there on your knees before God, cry out to God and say, God, give us that unity.

Give us more of it, Lord. Give us wisdom. Watch over it.

Help us to do our part here, God. And do not take it for granted. Our prayer affects the unity of this body.

We can enter into this prayer, this John 17 prayer, and pray in the will of God. Amen? And if we ask anything according to His will, we know that we have the petition that we desire of Him. Amen? If you ask according to His will, He heareth us.

And if He heareth us, we know we have the petition that we desire of Him. That's it. Pray that the Spirit of God would be poured out.

Pray for seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Pray over the hurting ones that are in this congregation, that God would minister to their needs. Number three.

How can we be diligent to keep the unity that the Spirit gives? Number three. By staying away from gossip and using our tongue aright. By staying away from gossip.

See, that's where those little wedges start. That's where they start. Gossip.

Did you hear? Did you hear what's going on? Do you know what's going on? No. Well, I probably shouldn't say. No, no, no, no, no.

Well, okay. You know how it goes. We all have our nice sanctified ways of dumping our gossip out to somebody else.

That will not keep the unity of the Spirit. It will not do it. I guarantee it.

Gossip. James says, Behold, how great a fire a little fire kindleth. And what he means there is, Look how a whole forest can catch on fire with one little match.

Wow. And James says, The tongue is a fire. Proverbs says that death and life are in the power of our tongue.

So we have choices to make. We can use our tongue to gossip. Or we can use our tongue to build up.

And give the benefit of the doubt to someone else. Be known as one who will not hear gossip. Do you know you can have that testimony? That those gossipers steer clear of you.

And they've got a story to tell. They don't come to you. Be known for that.

By the way, do you know how you get known for that? It's when you're standing in a circle and somebody is spitting those things out. You just say, Wait a minute, brothers. This doesn't seem right to me.

I don't think we should be doing this. And you know, it'll stop right there. I guarantee it.

It'll stop. But if you do that a couple of times, They'll steer clear of you. Or, if you don't have enough courage to do that, Just walk away.

And soon the message will still get across. He just walked away. Right in the middle of our conversation he just disappeared.

I wonder why. You suppose maybe we were saying something that he didn't want to hear? Be known as one who will not hear gossip. And also, be known as one who, When maybe somebody starts to say something like that, You're the one who steps in and says, You know, maybe he was just this.

Give him the benefit of the doubt. Rather than always take the other. Death and life are in the power of the tongue.

You can use this tongue both ways. And if you're a gossiper, I have this word for you. If you can't say it to their face, Then don't say it at all.

If your spirit is not pure enough To look them in the heart and say it, Then it shouldn't be said at all. James calls it all manner of evil. And it's devilish.

I would encourage you to speak powerful words of blessing and encouragement with your tongue. How can we endeavor to keep the unity of the spirits? Number four, by submission and respect to our authorities in the fellowship. And I have no reason to think That anybody is not respecting and submitting themselves to their authorities.

But I just want to bring the principle out here this morning. Because that has a lot to do with unity And all of you men who are heads in your homes, You know what I'm talking about. How can you have a unified home If you cannot lead your home and other people follow you? You can't have a unified home.

It's impossible. It's the same in the church. I know, I know.

Some of you had bad experiences. Some of you had some tough experiences. Maybe you had a leader that was a lord over you.

And they were strong. And they forced things. And they pushed their weight around.

That may be so. But we can't just swing all the way to the other side and say, I'm done with leadership. And I'm going to mistrust leadership.

And I'm going to give them the doubt before I give them the benefit every time. I'm going to scrutinize them and ask them questions. You can't do that.

It won't come out right. You say, what do I do? Then you need to get through to God, my friend. You need to get through to God on that issue.

And just realize, you've been hurt. You've been wounded. Get on your knees.

Get through to God about that thing. Ask God to heal your heart so you can get up off your knees and be a blessing to the leaders in your congregation. I speak those words because so many come to our congregations after having been wounded and criticized and leaders taking advantage of them and authority was abused in their lives.

And all those things, they come. But dear brothers and sisters, we can't carry all that baggage into a congregation. Somehow we've got to deal with those things and leave them behind and get up and be a blessing and a support to our leaders.

Unity is maintained through leadership. Allow yourselves to be persuaded, brothers and sisters. It's okay if your heart says, this is the way the ministry wants it and that's the way we're going to do it.

It's okay to think those kind of thoughts. As I said earlier this week, I'll say again this morning for the sake of the visitors, your children need to desperately need to hear you say those words. This is the way the ministry wants it.

That's the way we're going to do it. Family unity without some submission and respect to authority cannot happen. And church unity can't either.

And I want to just say this to us leaders, we leaders are to lead positively by inspiration and an example, not by lording it over God's heritage. Number five, how can I endeavor to keep the unity that the Spirit gives? By clearing and overcoming offenses. By clearing offenses and overcoming offenses.

This is preventative maintenance. There will be hurts that come in church life. I mean, come on, we're humans, you know.

We're all human, there's going to be hurts. People are going to say something to you and they won't even know that they stepped all over you. They won't know they did.

You know, that's just the way people are. You know, someone came to my dear wife a few years back and they said, Jackie, I am amazed at you. You know, I could never send my children away to the mission field.

I just love mine too much. I'm so amazed that you can send yours away. Oh my.

Talk about a knife in the heart, you know. They didn't mean anything by that. They didn't know what to say and they didn't know how to say it and they just said it, but they stuck a knife in her heart.

You know, it's like you don't love yours as much as I love mine and that's why you send yours away. That's not true. But listen, that happens all the time in church life.

What are we going to do with that? See? Those things happen. You know, we're just all pretty dumb. That's the bottom line.

And we don't know what to say. And if somebody gets in a hard situation, then we really don't know what to say. It's like we get double-tongued and we start stumbling over our words and we blurt out things that don't even make sense.

You should hear what people say to a bereaving widow at a funeral. Sometimes they say the dumbest things. That's just the way we are.

So what are we going to do with us humans? We're going to overcome all those offenses. That's what we're going to do. How do we do that? Two things I want to say about that.

Number one, this is your first option. Just pitch it in the cornfield. Do you have any of those down here, Brother Manny? Any cornfields down here? Just pitch it in the cornfield.

Just forgive and forget it. Just crucify your feelings. You know? Don't even wait until they come to you and say, you know, I hurt you.

Would you please forgive me? Don't even wait for that. Just pitch the whole thing in the cornfield and forgive them and go on. And maybe someday they'll come and say, you know, I was thinking about something I said the other day, and I realized I wasn't very sensitive.

Would you forgive me? And you can look them right in the eye with a free heart and say, oh, my brother, my sister, I've forgiven you already. God bless you. Be free.

Number two, if you can't throw it in the cornfield, then Matthew 18 is what God tells us to do. Matthew 18. If you can't just throw it in the cornfield, and I do believe that for many, many of the little things that happen in church life, God has a cornfield out there waiting for you.

We ought to be mature enough, spiritual enough to just take that thing, pitch it and go on. But if you can't, sometimes we can't. Sometimes there's deep wounds in our life and somebody blurts something out like that and it just like opens that wound up and it devastates us if you're in a place like that.

Then the next thing you do is, Matthew 18. You go and you share with them. That hurt me.

That hurt me. And you get it clear. You get it clear.

Listen, I've heard of whole churches that were dying, had an old-fashioned clearing, and it salvaged the church. The church was dying. And the church was dying.

And you know why? Because she hurt her and she hurt him and he wounded her and he stepped on him and nobody did anything to deal with it. And if you don't deal with them and you let them build up and you let them build up pretty soon, you've got a church full of people that are offended at each other. And when he goes in this door, you go out that one.

And you see him walking down the aisle this way and you come down the aisle this way. And you don't want to face him. You don't want to look at him.

And you don't want to put on that fake, you know, that facade, that feigned love. You know, you don't want to put on that feigned love look so you just go the other way around them. And pretty soon you have a church full of people like that.

And I've heard some beautiful testimonies of what happened when all of a sudden the church heard a message on this subject right here. And I mean the service lasted until three o'clock in the afternoon. And you know what took place in that service when the message was closed? One by one they got up and went across and fell on the other one's neck and forgave and got it clear.

And then somebody came down here and did the same. And somebody over here. And this went on for three or four hours.

And when it was done, the church was whole! And it was healed! Now, I don't perceive anything that drastic in this place. But like I said this morning, this is preventative maintenance. See, it's not God's will that you wait until it gets like that and then all of a sudden you have an old-fashioned family meeting and get it all cleared up.

No, God's will is that day by day as you go through life, if things like that start to work in your heart, that you go and you get it clear! See? Then it just stays clear. It stays clear all the time. That's our responsibility.

Matthew 18 is given for these very reasons. Let us maintain this unity a little bit at a time, brothers and sisters. Number six.

Let us endeavor to maintain a like-mindedness in our fellowship. We spoke about like-mindedness already this week. We spoke about its necessity that we do need to be going in the same direction if we're going to have unity in our hearts.

We spoke about that like-mindedness, but I'd like to speak about it again this morning in a little bit different light. That is, it's something on my part. Like-mindedness means I know where this church is going.

I know what the vision of this church is. I know the heart of the ministry. I've listened to their sermons.

I've listened to them speak in brothers' meetings. And I know what their heart is. And because I know the direction of this church, I am going to endeavor to maintain like-mindedness in this fellowship.

That means some of my decisions are going to be affected by how everybody else in this church thinks. And that's okay too! That's okay! Some time ago, I was at home, and I needed a vehicle. You know, these vehicles, they were out.

Mine was getting on, you know, 120, 130 something thousand miles. And I said, you know, I've got to get rid of this vehicle and get another one. So I'm looking around.

You know how it is. You're driving and you're watching. And I came upon this Jeep Cherokee.

You know, I mean, this thing was nice! Nice one! I don't know what year it was. I don't know those things that well. And it was a good price! You know, and I got out of my little Subaru station wagon and I looked at this Jeep Cherokee and I thought, man, that thing's nice! And the price is right! It's good! You know, the Lord said, Denny, no Denny.

That's not the way the brotherhood's going. That's not the way you want all the young men to go in the church, is it? You're right, Lord. And I went looking for a Subaru.

That's okay to do that! You know, if our heart says, I can buy anything I want and I can drive whatever I want and it shouldn't matter what kind of... If our heart has those kind of attitudes, there's something wrong with our hearts! Please, I'm not preaching against anybody who has a Jeep Cherokee. Somebody in our congregation had one a few weeks ago when I preached this sermon and they died as they were sitting there. I'm not preaching against anybody who has a Jeep Cherokee.

All I'm saying is, God wouldn't let me just buy what I wanted to buy. Even though it was a good price. You know, good prices have messed up a lot of churches, amen? The good wills have really messed up the churches a lot of times with good prices.

But I just passed that thing up. No big deal. No big deal.

We hear our ministers. We hear the tapes. Some of you that are just coming.

You came here because you heard the tapes. We sit in the brothers' meetings and we hear their hearts. Just give in to it.

Just give in to it. That's the way the church is going. Have a willing heart that wants to blend in here.

And if we know, brothers and sisters, then let's just go there. You know what it does? It frees the ministry to focus on the things that are most important. That's what it does.

It frees them to focus on the things that are most important. Number seven. Now I'm going to have to finish here.

Understand spiritual giftings. God gives gifts unto men. And even unto women.

God gives gifts to every single member in the body. He gives out severally as He will to every member of the body. But they're not all the same gifts.

And all gifts don't function the same way. We need to understand the spiritual giftings in the body. You know, there's a difference between a man who has a prophetic gift, who sees black and white, and I mean he can lay it out as clear as can be.

There's a difference between that brother and a brother who has a gift of mercy in his heart. You know, he just sees the need and he gives the benefit of the doubt and he just has a tender heart. And both of those are in this body.

And the one's not mean and hard and the other one's not a compromiser. But sometimes, you know, if you don't understand that God works differently in each and every one of us, you can easily do that. You can say, that guy, he is just mean and hard and cold as can be.

And the other one will say, I'm so sick of that compromiser and all those mushy words that he says in a brother's meeting. I've had it. I've had it with him.

Maybe you don't understand how God is gifting that brother. God sets gifts in the members of the body severally as He will. And we need all of those gifts in the body.

And we need to understand that we're not the same. God doesn't want us to be the same. That's how this body becomes a mature functioning man.

Because all those gifts find their place and all those gifts are given their place and the church moves forward that way. I remember a dear brother in our congregation. He's not in our congregation anymore.

This man was just unusually blessed with a merciful heart. He saw everything through eyes of mercy. And when I began to discover what was in that brother, he became one of the greatest helps to me in a brother's meeting.

One of the greatest helps. And I would go to him for counsel when something was difficult and I wasn't sure what decision to make. I would go to him for counsel and say, Brother, here's a situation.

What do you think? And I knew what he was going to tell me. I knew how he was going to look at it. And I gave it to him that way.

And just sat back to listen. See what I can learn from this merciful man. In Ephesians, the Scriptures in Ephesians speak about us being gathered together, quickened together.

We're made to sit together in heavenly places. It speaks of us being fitly framed together. It speaks of us being built together.

The Scriptures speak about striving together, being followers together, and being knit together. Beloved brothers and sisters, let's stay together. Because God has put us together.

And the world will know that the Father sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. In closing, let's read over in Psalms. Psalm 133.

You know that famous chapter? Psalm 133. In closing. I think I can get it done by noon here.

Psalm 133 is one of the songs of degree in the book of Psalms. There are 15 songs of degree in the book of Psalms. These songs were sung by the Israelites as they marched up to the city of Jerusalem three times a year for the feasts and for to worship.

And as they marched back down and went back to their homes, it was kind of like three Camp Wesleys a year. Amen? Where all the Israelites gathered together in Jerusalem. They sang these songs as they were ascending up to Mount Zion.

And they sang some of them as they were going back out into their place. For example, I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord. That's one of the songs of ascent up into Mount Zion.

Well, Psalm 133 is one of the songs they sang as they were going away. It's like at the end of Camp Wesley. Amen? You know what I'm talking about.

Woo! Glory! Sweet! Beautiful! Glorious time! Wonderful fellowship! God is so good to us! By the way, Psalm 134 is also another one of those. That's where we get our song, come bless the Lord, all ye servants of the Lord, which stand by night in the house of the Lord. Lift up your hands.

We sang that this morning. That's Psalm 134. That's also a song that they sang as they went away.

But I just want you to know the history of the song and what is flowing in the hearts of the people as they sing this song after Camp Wesley is over and they're heading back home. Behold! Behold! That word behold means stop, ponder, gaze upon with great reflection. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

I want you to notice the unity that is in that verse. Brethren, that's unity. Dwell, that's unity.

Together, that's unity. And unity, that's unity. This is the overflow of the hearts of the Israelites after several days of worshipping God and fellowshiping with one another.

Oh, behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. It's the overflow of their heart. It is like... Now God is making an analogy here.

It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard even Aaron's beard that went down to the skirts of his garment. It is a unifying ointment. It is an ointment of a sweet-smelling savor.

It is an ointment that has a tremendous influence if you could just picture that when Aaron the high priest was anointed with the holy anointing oil, oil that was not to be poured on anything else but that which was sacred and sanctified and set apart, they took a whole cruise of oil and dumped it on Aaron's head. And it ran down over his head and down onto his beard and onto his garment and down to the hems of his garment this ointment went. And everywhere Aaron went he smelled beautiful and everybody could smell

him for a long ways away because he was saturated in holy anointing oil.

That is what unity is like. Oh glory! It is like that. And then it is also like the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion.

The dew of Hermon? If the dew of Hermon is very special dew, Mount Hermon couldn't make it without that dew because there wasn't a lot of rain in that place. But there was a dew every morning, a thick dew that kept Mount Hermon full of life and vitality and flowers and grass and everything that's good. And everybody knew about the famous dew of Mount Hermon.

And God says that unity is like that. It is full of life-giving force. And then God finishes by saying for there, in that place of unity, the Lord commanded the blessing even life forevermore.

Brothers and sisters, we have been gathered together, we've been quickened together, we've been made to sit together, we are framed together, we are built together, we have been fitly joined together, we should be striving together, we should be followers together, and we have been knit together. Brothers and sisters, let's stay together, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace because I'm telling you, whether you understand the depths of what I'm saying this morning or not, there is power in that unity. We must have it.

We must. In Jesus' name.

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