

The Beauty of Unity

by Jim Cymbala

Jim Cymbala's sermon highlights the critical importance of unity in the church and society, warning against the destructive nature of division.

Duration: 33:40

Scripture: Psalm 66:18, Matthew 5:9, Matthew 12:25, Matthew 13:33, Matthew 18:20, Mark 3:20, Romans 16:17-18

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by sharing that he felt prompted to preach a different message than planned. He then reads from the book of Mark, specifically chapter 3, where Jesus enters a house and a crowd gathers around him. The preacher emphasizes the importance of unity and warns against division, stating that anything divided against itself becomes weak and eventually crumbles. He references various examples, such as a choir, a deacon board, and even a nation, to illustrate the destructive nature of division. The preacher concludes by highlighting the New Testament's instruction to mark and avoid those who cause division, emphasizing the importance of love and unity in the church.

Transcript

Now, I felt prompted while the praise and worship was going on to not preach what I preached at nine o'clock, which is rare. I usually do that when I'm preaching at nine and twelve, and I want to go to something totally different. I want you to just listen to me.

This is just needed for all of us, but maybe there's someone, especially visiting from another church, another city, you need to hear this and maybe be the messenger of the Lord as you go back to your church family. We read in the book of Mark, at the very beginning, Mark the third chapter, we read this story. When Jesus entered a house, verse 20 of chapter three, then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat.

When his family heard about this, they went out to take charge of him, for they said, he is out of his mind. By the way, is that not a tragic picture? Jesus was so busy doing good, his schedule was so hectic at times, but remember, he didn't start ministering until he was 30 years old. What he did all during his 20s, we have no knowledge of whatsoever, except he wasn't publicly known and involved in ministry.

But his own family came to him, his own family, his half-brothers, his half-sisters, and other family members and said, he's gone out of his mind, he won't stop, there's just people everywhere. And the

teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, he's possessed by Beelzebub, and Beelzebub is the prince of darkness, denoting for us Satan. By the prince of demons, he's driving out demons.

You know why he has authority over these evil spirits? Because he's on their side. So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables. How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.

And if a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand. His end has come.

There's this hit movie out about Abraham Lincoln. There's a lot of remembrances of Lincoln who, of all the presidents of the United States, he's had more written about him than anybody else. And is ranked by anyone who knows any kind of history, always number one as the greatest president we've ever had.

And Lincoln's biography and Lincoln's life is very interesting. He was eccentric in certain ways, and he's the only president in the history of our country who did not belong to any religious denomination or church. One of the reasons he didn't was his tender soul was turned off as growing up by the fussing and fighting among the Methodists and Baptists and other Presbyterians that he saw in Kentucky, Indiana, and then later in Illinois.

But Lincoln was an obscure congressman and then failed at several elections living in Illinois, when in the late 1850s and mid-1850s, he became embroiled in the thing that was capturing all of America's attention. And that was the fight by the abolitionists who wanted to abolish slavery, which was the peculiar institution of the United States of America. And slaves had been brought over from pre-Declaration of Independence time and, of course, afterward.

And they provided the cheap labor that was needed to keep the southern culture of cotton, mostly cotton going on, although some tobacco, but mostly cotton. The abolitionist movement spread and a lot of people lost their lives and the whole country was in turmoil because the abolitionists said, we've got to get rid of slavery. This is a sin, a blot against America, and it's been going on too long.

The founding fathers looked the other way. And so did Thomas Jefferson when he said, all men are created equal. We find these truths to be self-evident to us that all men are created equal.

Well, they really didn't mean that because they were treating human beings as not equal. Certain of the abolitionist leaders would not, religious ones, one famous revivalist whose writings have affected me, he wouldn't celebrate the 4th of July because he said it's a travesty because it's a lie that's being lived out as slaves are being beaten and misused and families are being torn as they come off the boat in South Carolina in a place that I was once at, a very, very creepy, horrible, dark place where the slaves were actually just sold as merchandise. Well, the South, of course, said, no, we'll secede.

This is our thing, and we're going to keep it going. It was basically a defense of their lifestyle, although the church got caught up with it and preachers got caught up with it, and everybody was now using the Bible to defend this horrible thing, which totally went against the teachings of Jesus Christ. Lincoln was out there and made a speech which ended up making him so famous that he got put onto the new Republican Party ticket and he became president eventually.

And his speech was first done out in Illinois, but it became very famous. It was called the House Divided Against Itself speech, and he not only gave it there, but some influential abolitionist leaders who were

involved in the press here in New York brought him right to Lower Manhattan, and there in Lower Manhattan, he delivered, the school escapes me now, but I'll think of it while I'm speaking now. He spoke and gave this speech.

The press picked it up, spread it all around the country, which was much smaller then, and Lincoln became known for his House Divided Against Itself speech. And Lincoln's point was this. America will either be all slave or it'll be all free.

It'll either be all slaves or all free, but it'll have to be one or the other because no house, quoting Jesus, no house divided against itself can stand. It'll crumble. With the tension and division that's going on in the country, the country will come apart at the seams eventually, and it'll end up being all free, which it did, or it'll be all slave, but it won't stay slave and free.

It can't. And he quoted Jesus, which he ended up in the end quoting from the Bible more than any other president because he read it all during those dark days of the Civil War when more American blood was shed and more Americans died than in all the other wars still that we have fought, put together. The carnage was so great.

Lincoln used that speech to try to reason with people and say we can't continue this way. The way it happened to Jesus where the original words were said were much more malicious. Jesus was performing miracles and people were being freed from the influence of Satan.

And when people saw him doing it, some praised him and said this is certainly a prophet or somebody special. But the religious leaders who knew that he was rocking their boat and threatening their perks and their power, and they were jealous of him, they had to spin it. And the way they spun it was, oh, you know why he's casting out demons and he's freeing people? Because he's on the side of the dark side.

He's on the side of Satan. He's doing this by the Prince of Beelzebub. So within that organizations of demons and authorities and powers, he's just giving orders and that's why they obey him.

Now Jesus, you would think, would have stepped back and said, wait, do you know where I'm from? Do you know how I was born? He could have referred to his virgin birth. He could have said a lot of things, but he didn't. He caught them or he addressed them in their own line of reasoning which was fallacious.

And he said, think of what you're saying. You're saying I'm on the side of Satan and I'm casting out Satan and Satan is leaving people. But if I'm on the side of Satan and Satan is casting out Satan, then Satan is divided against himself.

And if he's, he's way too smart for that. If he's divided against himself, then his kingdom will have an end. For he laid down a principle.

Anything divided against itself automatically becomes weak. Anything that stays divided against itself is eventually going to crumble. Any kingdom divided against itself, any kingdom, Jesus said, any kingdom, any church, any family, any nation, any choir, any deacon board, any, anything, anything that's divided is automatically weakened and if the division continues, it will disintegrate.

Jesus said that. You could take it to the bank. It's absolutely true.

He didn't say all the people were evil in it. He said there's something about division. The name of this message is the beauty of unity.

He's saying that division automatically causes problems and weakness and things crumble that should have gone on, but the cause of it was right inside. The termites that were eating the structure were the people who were divisive and the divisive talk. I didn't know this until I went to high school, captained the team at Erasmus Hall High School and then went on to college and played on a fairly high level, played in NCAA tournament, March Madness, but it was there that I knew all too well that a team, this happened with one guy at Erasmus Hall High School, the team is better off if it loses someone who plays well if he's a divisive person.

It's better to have less talent but be united and be on the same page than it is to have guys who are super talented but are full of themselves and cause trouble and talk in the locker room and divide one person against another, then the team goes out and there's all kinds of problems and you lose when you should have won and the cause is division. That happens even on a pro level. That happens on any level.

Anything divided, when there's division, there's all kinds of problems. I remember hearing a major league baseball player say that the reason his team didn't win more games when he was playing was he said, you had to be in our locker room. Guys hated each other, talked about each other, were jealous, wouldn't cooperate with each other and baseball is less a team sport than let's say football or basketball.

But once you have division, all hell is going to break loose and Jesus laid that down as a principle. He said, what are you talking about? If I'm on the side of Satan and I'm casting out Satan, do you think Satan is that foolish that he would divide his own kingdom? Then he'd have an end. He's way too smart for that.

But we're not. Because everywhere you look in our country, there's division. There's division politically.

I can't remember more rancor and talk and anger than what's going on and meanness than going on between Republicans and Democrats, Democrats and Republicans. And for some of them, you wonder, they don't care what happens to the country. They have their agenda, no one's going to compromise.

Other one doesn't want the other one to look bad or look good and people avoid facing distasteful truths like entitlements and some of our budgetary problems. Nobody wants to face it because then the other one will say, look, he wants to cut that and take it away from you even though everyone knows we can't go on in this fantasy. But it's all just rancor and division and we're paying for it.

Civil War ended in 1865, so that's 35 plus 100, 135 plus now 13, that's 148 years ago. The Civil War ended, but you wouldn't know it in some places. The prejudice and hatred of minorities, reverse racism by blacks against whites or Latinos against everybody or whatever, is it not alive and well on planet Earth? Not only that, over in Africa where they're all of one color, let's say black, the tribes kill each other because you're not from my tribe.

So the Hutus killed the Tutsis in one country, all in the name of you're not like us. You're not like us. Whenever I hear that, I think of what if God had that attitude and looked down at us and said, you are not like me.

I don't know what I'm going to do with you. You're so different. You ever hear people excuse their prejudices by saying, but they're so different.

Different? You want to know what different is? Look in the mirror and then read the Bible. That's different. How many say amen? That's really different.

But even now as I'm speaking, I discern that some are silently squirming in their seats or in their hearts because you grew up around that filth. You grew up around that ugliness. You grew up around subtle prejudices.

Listen, I went in the ministry and I would hear, I'd be down south or other places. I hear ministers tell jokes that were racially ugly or use words that are unthinkable. And then get up and preach that God is love.

It's a wonder anybody becomes a Christian. Right now in a recent poll taken of thousands of people, quoting the best I can. I saw this in the Times.

No, I saw it in a book which mentioned this church and a review of a book about what's wrong with Christianity in America. Right now that poll showed that 8% of people, you know, being polled but not giving their name, 8% of the people had negative views of Jewish people. And something like 28% had negative views about Muslims.

And 47% had negative views about evangelical Christians. Now, some of it is I know, light and darkness and darkness and light. And Jesus said, if they hated me, they hate you.

I got that. I know that. I got that part.

But let's fess up. A lot of it is because so Christians are so mean-spirited and critical and nasty and ugly and prejudiced in their black ways, in their white ways, in their Latino ways, in their northern ways, in their southern ways, with disdain on anyone who doesn't agree with them. This is why Lincoln didn't go to church.

Because Methodists would visit him and talk bad about the Baptists. And the Baptists would come and tell him the Methodists didn't know what was up. And he would read the teachings of Jesus and said, well, then they're all hypocrites.

It's fairly logical, though, isn't it? But some of us have taken this in with our mother's milk. So it's very hard for us to hear talk like this. But we need to hear about it because we want to be peacemakers in 2013.

How many want to be a peacemaker? Lift up your hand. A peacemaker. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

God is not about disunity and division. In fact, before I wrap this all up, I'd like to mention two verses to you that some of you are not even aware are in the Bible. One of the verses is at the end of Romans, where Paul says, I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions in the church and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to what you have learned.

Keep away from them, for people, those such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. Listen again. I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions, who talk about other people behind their backs, who talk about other people to put them down behind their backs, who have a comment and an opinion about everything as if they know, as if their opinion is very, very important.

I warn you to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles. Keep away from them, for such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. Every divisive person, by definition, is not serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't care if they raise the dead, speak in tongues, and quote the Bible. They're not serving the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not, for the Bible says they're not.

Then finally, in a word to a younger minister, Paul tells Titus this. Warn a divisive person as a pastor. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time.

After that, have nothing to do with such a person. Warn a divisive person once, then when he keeps doing it, warn him twice. After that, have no contact with him.

Treat him as if he was not a believer, because then you might shame him into repenting. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful. He's self-condemned.

Why? What's he doing? Drugs? What's he doing? Smoking weed? No, he's doing something worse. Because when you smoke weed and you do drugs, you only hurt your body. But when you cause division, you hurt the body of Christ.

And God says, anybody who destroys this body, God will destroy. Listen to what the Lord's Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians. Anyone, know you not that you are the body.

Now, the body is used two ways. My own physical body is the body of Christ. It's the temple, because the Holy Spirit lives inside of me.

But then it's used in first-person plural. We, you, plural. Don't you know, plural, that you are the temple, the body of Christ.

Anyone who destroys the body, God will destroy. I wonder how many people have died early or been struck down by God with some problem. And no one has been able to discern the root.

And they just wrote it off as, well, it happens to every kind of people, all kinds of people. But who knows that God hasn't visited some kind of discipline on some of us because we cause division. You and I look at it and go, what's the big deal? You know, abortions are wrong.

And legalized gambling, we wouldn't want to do that. And all these other things. And I'm all with you.

But a little talk, a little gossip, a little division. You know, I have talks with the choir members before they come in the choir after Carol tests them vocally and then they're interviewed. And in the last couple of years, we had to sit a few people down.

And I referred them to the talk that I gave to them. And I said, do you remember when you sat in my office with about seven or eight others? Yes, Pastor. Do you remember what I told you? That we're trying to sing so that people are blessed up in the balcony and across the street watching me on the camera.

We want to bless them. Somebody could walk in here who just tested positive HIV and feels they have a death sentence. And now they're reaching out for God.

They want help. And the only way the music can be a blessing is if it's anointed by the Holy Spirit. God doesn't use voices.

He doesn't use lyrics per se. He doesn't use melodies and licks and riffs and chords. No, he uses the people who sing it.

He anoints people who sing it. But what if you've been talking about other choir members and now you've grieved the Holy Spirit and he won't help us? He won't help the choir. And Carol's killing herself in the choir's practice.

But you, because of your mouth, has grieved away the Holy Spirit. And now we're not going to reach that person the way we should reach that person? Oh, no, you won't do that. Because if we find out you talk, you'll be out of the choir.

We will come for you. Why? That's not to be, this is not the Marine Corps. It's not Parris Island.

We're not trying to be hard-nosed about the whole thing. It's just being practical. If we're going to do it, let's do it right.

All in favor, clap your hands. Come on. If we're going to do it, do it right.

Now, do we not run into people who hurt us? Do we not run into people who are not very lovely and who are kind? Right. And if they hurt us and if they do something that we take exception to, the Bible tells us exactly what to do. But you can't be a coward and talk behind their back.

What you do is you confront the person and you go to them and say, I love you in the Lord, but what you said or what you did or what I heard you said, what I heard that you said, you know, that wounded me. And then they have a chance to explain. And then what you can do is you can kneel with them.

And then if they say, no, get out of my face, I'll talk any way I want. Well, no, now you're going to go see Pastor Petri. You're going to see Pastor Delene.

You're going to see Pastor Symbola because any house divided against itself. We're doomed. We're doomed.

Oh, no, Pastor, let's have a week of prayer. We're still doomed. Even prayer can't overcome division.

No, it can't. Because the Bible says, if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me. Why is the average church in America down to 73 people? 78 people.

Used to be 100 something. Because Satan is too strong? Because there's no prayer in schools? Please be real. What would prayer in schools have to do with the church of Jesus Christ? Why do you think it's down there? I'll tell you one.

I was in a recent city representing the Billy Graham Association this past year. And I was there to do an all-day pastors conference with pastors from that city. Then at night lead a prayer rally.

Franklin Graham was coming months and months later. But I didn't have to get in and sponsor that. It was just get the people praying that God would visit that city, which is in a difficult state, difficult place.

And I went in this building of a certain denomination, a large denomination. I went in the building. And something about the building just moved me.

Just that it was so beautiful. It was so neat and clean. And it seated about 800 people.

So during the day, I said, why are we having the conference at this church? Well, the church offered it. And this is one of the prettiest churches in the whole city. I said, yeah, I can see that.

So I said to one of the guys, the sound guy who worked there. So what's going on with this church? He said, oh, you don't want to know. I said, no, I want to know.

He said, oh, you don't want to know. I said, no, I want to know. So he said, oh, the church had some beautiful things happening in it.

It split three times in the last three years. 100 left, 150 left. One pastor was an associate, took off, took 50 people with him, started a church a mile away.

You know, beautiful things like that. Split three times. Fussing, fighting.

And then they wonder, why aren't converts being made? Where are all the converts? God is on the throne. For the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. Do you think people are going to get saved in a hotbed of hell? You think so? I don't think so.

I got so burdened during the day. Everton, I couldn't take it. I got through with the meeting at night.

I'm leaving with the Billy Graham folks and an associate. And it was in the summer, and I'm on the steps of the church. And I said, stop, let's pray right now.

Because the church is down to like 120 people. Let's stop. It used to have 600 or whatever.

Let's stop and pray right now for this church. I have no connection to this church in the sense of denomination. But that's the point.

We're all in the same church. There are no denominations. Do you get it? There are no Baptists.

There was one Baptist, John the Baptist. He's died, he's in heaven, leave him alone. There's no Baptists.

There's no assemblies of God. There's no Presbyterians. There's no Lutherans.

These things don't exist to God. The Bible says there's only one Lord. There's only one faith.

There's only one baptism. And there's only one body. There's only one body, the body of Christ.

So this just bothered me. And what bothered me worse was the interim pastor. I met him.

He had been retired. They pulled him out because the pastor had left. And they pulled him out and put him in there just tending the store.

So I met him finally at night. And he says, I hear you've been asking about me. And I hear you have an interest in our church.

I said, yeah, I hear there's financial struggles because the thing has gone down. And he says in front of total strangers to me, yeah, they're not going to make it. This place is going under.

It was like somebody took a sword and put it through my heart. I didn't know what to say because there were people there, a worship team from another church. How could a man say that when he's the pastor? He's the shepherd.

Where do you think this place is going to go? That's the shepherd. So I got it. I came back.

You know, Polish people, we're not gifted, but we're relentless. We're like, we keep at it. I called an official for that denomination who covers that part of the country.

And I said, listen, you don't know me. I don't know you. He said, oh, I know you.

I read your book. Is this really Jim Simba? No, it's Harry Houdini. I don't know who I am.

Just, okay. So I want to help you, brother. Well, why would you want to help us? I said, we want to help you.

Our church wants to help you. We'll pray. I got into the prayer band.

We're praying for you. I'll send one of our pastors out. We have some people for testimony.

They don't need an honorarium. Maybe just cover the fair. The first one will be on me.

But we got to save this church. You're over this, right? What I don't understand is you're not in our denomination. Why would you want to help our church? That's the spirit that kills.

You're not in our denomination. So I gave him a lecture. He wasn't expecting.

And I said, sir, I am in your denomination. It's called the body of Christ. And we're all in this thing together.

And I'm rooting. Don't you get it? I'm rooting for you. And obviously, you were emphasizing the power of God's word.

And some preacher was emphasizing the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But someone forgot to tell the people that if any house is divided against itself, it cannot stand because that's what happened to your church. And God needs to baptize everybody with love and get a pastor in.

And I'm really, I'm distraught by the situation because I'm still on the phone with him. And so is Pastor Delina. And I'm saying to him, so don't you have someone in all your seminaries that wants to come and take over that church, that beautiful building? So there's some debt.

So from what I read, God has some money. No, no, everyone who graduates, they want to have fixed salary. They want to know the whole package or they won't come.

He then said to me, can you find someone? I said, sir, you don't even know me. You know of me. We've never met.

You're going to now put it on me and you're the head of this major denomination. Just fussing, fighting, arguing. He said, there's one man in the town who could help us.

He used to be in our denomination. But since he left and traveled away, he didn't renew his credentials. So he's not in our denomination.

I wouldn't touch him with a 10 foot pole. That's what he's telling me. You can't make this stuff up.

You can't make this stuff up. I knew better than that playing in the playgrounds in New York City playing basketball. Grabbing guys who are 6'8", 6'9".

Are you going to play with us? Hey, listen, you're going to play on the team. We're going to play together. If you don't want to, then get on the bench and don't play with us.

But if we're going to play, we got to play together. We got to love each other. We got to cover each other's back.

Do we not? Because any house divided against itself can't stand. And look at how they treated it in the New Testament. Some of you people, when I read those verses, your reaction would be, where's the love of God? What do you mean, mark those who cause division, take note of them, and after a second warning, don't even talk to them or eat with them.

Where's the love of God in all of that? Where's the love of God? That's like cutting out a cancer. Some people are cancers. And until God heals them and changes their spirit, they can destroy a whole lot of folks.

And here's the rule when you're a pastor. You never love any single person more than the group. The group is the most important.

I owe it to God to watch out for you. No matter how I love a certain person, if they're doing something that's divisive, I have to deal with it or else they could infect the whole body. Remember, a little leaven leavens the whole loaf, a little talk.

So this year, we're going to make a godly resolution, no talking. No talking about anybody. The band's going to be unified, which I trust it is, the choir, the church, the deacons, the pastors, all of us.

And you have the authority from me. If you're a member here and you that are visiting, why don't you bring that message back to your church and say, maybe the reason God isn't blessing more is that we're grieving him. This is why pastors have the highest rate of heart attacks.

You don't think it's from making sermons, do you? No, it's dealing with folks. With one hand, it's, oh, Lord, send a blessing. And with all the divisive talk, gossip, slander, strife, it's get out of here, Holy Spirit.

So here's a church. They're on a treadmill. God, come.

No, God, go away. No, Lord, come. We need you.

We can't do a thing without you. Did you hear about what she did last week? I don't want that. As long as I have breath, I want to do it the best I can with God's help to be a peacemaker.

So let's bow our heads. Father God, I'm out on a limb. No notes, nothing but what I felt was a prompting from you.

And how should we end? Except by praying, God, that you would forgive us for any divisive words that we've spoken in 2012. Any unkind criticisms, not to a person's face. No, we didn't do it that way, Lord.

We did it behind their backs. And we would never want anyone to do that to us, but we do it to others. Thus, we disobey your first commandment.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Forgive us. Unify our pastors, our deacons, the choir, the prayer band, BT Kids, the band, every ministry in the church, the seniors.

Give us a holy fear of divisiveness. Help us to protect one another like we would our best friend or our own mothers or fathers. Lastly, Lord, a divided heart cannot stand.

This is why David prayed, unite my heart to fear your name. Any of us who are in the building today and our hearts are divided, we want you, and yet there's strong opposition in our own heart against you. And someone might think and say, no, that can't be.

But Lord, you know all things. Unite our hearts to fear your name. We only have one heart, but unite it.

Help us to be dedicated and consecrated to you. How many have received God's word for us this afternoon? Say amen. That's a pure word, right? That we heard, that purifies your heart.

Okay, so we're going to go into an athletic mode right now. Everybody stand. No handshaking or hugging.

High five 10 people and say, you're on my team. Come on, high five them. You're on my team.

You are on my team.

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