

Live in Harmony with One Another

April 14, 2024

Pray for Lisa! (any women from her Bible studies)

- Serve one another
- Care for one another
- Comfort one another
- Do good to one another
- Bear one another's burdens
- Encourage one another
- Honor one another

This morning we are going to investigate a cluster of one anothers in the NT that harmonize together. According to various translations, this cluster of exhortations include:

- Agree with one another; be of the same mind with one another
- Live in harmony with one another
- Be at peace with one another

The corresponding negative exhortations would be:

- Do not speak against one another; do not grumble against one another
- Do not judge one another

These exhortations are a call to *unity* within the family of God. We live in a world that is passionately inclined to disunity. Hashtag cancel culture is the war cry of many in our society today. But Christians are called to live redemptively in a way that creates unity and harmony within the church made up of a diverse people through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Unity is not merely a lack of conflict. *Unity is the strength of a believer's union with Christ consolidated with other believers who are also in union with Christ.* It's like a grid of rebar in a concrete wall which gives it enduring strength. The vertical rebar is each believer's union with Christ. The horizontal rebar is each believer's bond with other believers. So unity in the church is strengthened by our union with Christ and each other, enabling us to withstand the hurricane winds of worldly culture.

Thus, *unity is a witness to the power and effectiveness of the gospel* (as we will later see in John 17). True unity and harmony in this world can only be found in Christ, because only in Him do we find true freedom from our deep propensity toward selfishness. Unity in the body of Christ testifies to the authenticity of God's love and the transforming power of the gospel displayed through our relationships.

Finally, *unity in the body of Christ reveals and represents something intensely beautiful about God*—3 distinct persons dwelling in unity together.

What I want to do today is look at several exhortations that call us to unity. And each of them in their particular context will provide some practical points of application to help us stand strong together in the Lord.

1. A Call to Unity: "Live in Harmony with One Another" (Rom 15:5).

[Romans 15:1-7] Notice that vs. 5 is addressing the God of the Bible (cf. vs. 4). If the church is an orchestra, the bible is our sheet music that helps us 'get on the same page' and play together with a unified purpose under one conductor—Christ! Renewing our minds with the truth of God's word is what enables us to live in harmony with one another, or as the NAS says, to "be of the same mind with one another."

Did you notice rebar grid in vs. 5? "Live in such harmony with one another" (horizontal), "in accord with Christ Jesus" (vertical). And what's the result of this horizontal and vertical bond, this bond with each other in our bond with Christ? Unity!—"That together you may with *one voice* glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

What does it mean for a church to have one voice? What it doesn't mean is that we all have to think the same about everything. The bible gives us unity of thought on the essential things. Yet there are secondary issues in life that we may have different perspectives on.

Let me put it this way. Unity is not necessarily unison. In music unison is when we all sing the same note. Unity can be expressed in unison, but it can

also be expressed in harmony where we sing different notes and sometimes even different rhythms, but they work together toward a singular purpose resulting in beautiful music. Harmony is diversity blended together into unity.

- Disunity – concert band warming up (a train wreck to the ears)
- Unity in unison – Band all playing the same tuning note concert B flat)
- Unity expressed in harmony – when the band plays a composition with varying yet coordinated rhythms and harmony that displays a unity of direction and purpose under the conductor.

So what does it mean for the church to have one voice? It means that we take our cues from the Bible as our sheet music (not just our own thoughts), and we all fix our eyes on following Christ, the conductor, together so that our lives harmonize with one another. On matters that the Bible speaks clearly to, we submit to Christ who is our conductor and who has given us the sheet music of His word.

But what about the times when we have disagreements from differing perspectives on secondary things? We can live peaceably with one another by listening to each other for the purpose of seeking to understand, and then applying what the bible clearly says about *how* we are to live together in humility when we have differing perspectives. **When we are in the realm of content that the Bible has not given us clarity on, remember that the Bible is never unclear regarding the character with which we are to relate to one another** (or even disagree with one another).

This requires us to take a *step up* in maturity. If we agree on a particular issue, it's relatively easy to live peaceably. But if we disagree on an issue, it takes more maturity to live peaceably with one another because it will expose flaws in our character and reveal how much we want our own way.

2. **Unity requires humility** (Rom 12:16).

[Rom 12:15-18] The fact that unity requires humility is evident in vs. 15. In the same breath Paul says, “live in harmony with one another” and “do not

be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” Paul is talking about the kind of humility that promotes unity by overcoming partiality. It may help to point out that the phrase “live in harmony” (ESV) is translated in NAS as “be of the same mind toward one another.” In other words, you can associate with “the lowly” because you don’t see them as lower. *Humility takes the competition out of relationships by removing pride.* You can’t be humble and jealous or humble and envious at the same time. You can’t be humble and prideful (looking down on someone) at the same time. But when you are humble, you can rejoice with those who rejoice, and you can weep with those who weep. When you are humble, you can disagree on lesser doctrinal issues or whether to build debt free or take out a mortgage and still live peaceably. Humility allows us to value our relationships enough to protect them when we struggle to make decisions on non-essential things.

If we just start working on unity, we won’t get very far. But if we work on humility while keeping our focus on Christ, we will grow in unity.

3. **Unity requires serving the body** (1Thess 5:13).

[1Thess 5:12-14] This passage is a little bit like the 3 steps from your garage into your house. We are aiming for the 3rd step but it’s a little hard to get there without the first two. The first step toward unity (or living in peace with one another) in vs. 12 is to honor godly leadership. **[12-13a]** We will not have unity without honoring godly leadership in the church. This does not mean that church leaders always get things right without mistakes. But according to vs. 12, if they are working diligently, having been raised up by the Lord, and they are admonishing you (that is, warning you or seeking to correct you), you would be wise to seriously consider their admonition. Before you become defensive, consider that you may have a blind spot that they can help you see.

The second step toward unity (or living in peace with one another) in vs. 13 is to intentionally pursue peace: “Be at peace among yourselves.” The only way to have peace in our relationships is to actively pursue peace. *Peacemaking is not waiting for the other person to see their wrong.* Peacemaking is humbly pursuing reconciliation, by taking responsibility for

anything that we have contributed negatively to the situation while refusing to let bitterness assassinate our hearts. Then once we have assessed our own hearts, we speak the truth in love to the other person while always looking for the sanctifying work that God wants to do in our own lives.

Finally, the 3rd step toward unity (or living in peace with one another) is *serving God's sanctifying purposes in one another's lives*. [vs. 14] If someone is idle, the way to serve God's sanctifying purposes in their life is to admonish them. If someone is fainthearted, the way to serve God's sanctifying purposes in their life is to encourage them. If someone is weak, the way to serve God's sanctifying purposes in their life is to help them. And the way to serve to God's sanctifying purposes in anyone's life is to be patient with them.

Notice that what the elders are doing in vs. 12, namely admonishing, so the church members are to do for one another—admonishing, encouraging, and helping with great patience.

So when we say that unity requires serving the body, we're not talking about church programs. I'm talking about vs. 14—loving one another and caring about one another enough to speak into each other's lives for the purpose of helping each other grow.

4. **Unity requires guarding the body** (Mark 9:50).

We looked at Mark 9:49-50 briefly last week. But today I want to draw out the connection between being at peace with one another (vs. 50) and the earlier context of purging sin from our lives so that we don't cause others to stumble. Obviously, when we sin in ways that cause others to stumble in their faith or obedience to Christ, we are disrupting the peace, harmony, and unity of the body. [Mark 9:42-50]

Clearly Jesus is using figurative language here. He's not calling us to literally cut off a hand or foot or pluck out an eye. But what He is saying is that it would be better to be limbless than to let sin go on unconquered in our life and causing others to stumble. Why? Because the consequence of sin (apart from true repentance and divine forgiveness) is severe. So living in peace

through unity and harmony requires us to guard the body by purging our lives of sin.

One of those sins, according to James, is grumbling against one another. **James 4:11-12** – “Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the One who is able to save and to destroy; but who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

James 5:9 – “Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.” (James 5:9)

I may come back to this next week because the exhortation to not judge one another is complex and one which we need to carefully administer in our day. What it does *not* mean is that we are to restrain ourselves from calling out sin for what it is. But for today's purpose, note that we cannot have unity, peace, or harmony if we are grumbling against one another or making improper judgments of one another from personal standards or perceptions rather than coming under the clear judgment of God's word.

Grumbling or complaining against one another with a critical spirit makes us vulnerable to the discipline of the Lord. God takes grumbling very seriously. It cost the Israelites 40 years in the wilderness. When we grumble against one another, we are contradicting the way God relates to us and our fellow believers with grace.

Why does God discipline those who grumble against Him and His children? Because in doing so we are setting ourselves up as a judge who is above God's law. To put it simply, grumbling against one another and improperly judging one another is an act of treason—seeking to usurp God's rightful place as the divine Judge.

We must guard the unity of the body by repenting of a critical spirit that grumbles against one another out of a judgmental heart.

5. Unity requires restoring the body (2Cor 13:11).

The reality is that sometimes we do sin against each other. And when that happens, we need to do *everything we can* to be restored to one another by seeking reconciliation.

We have already been to 2 Cor 13:11 in our series, but we return to it again. The Corinthian church, more than any other NT church, struggled with conflict. Here's Paul's closing letter to them...

“Finally brethren, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you” (2Cor 13:11).

When we hear vs. 11 as the pursuit of healthy relationships, we come to one conclusion: *It's not ok for the church to be frayed or divided. It's not ok for the church to be cold in its love for one another or competing with one another or allowing strife and bitterness to persist. We must make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace* (Rom 12:18).

Now notice the promised result of true Christian affection: *“The God of love and peace will be with you.”* Here's the point: The presence of God is manifested through the genuine unity and affection that we experience among God's people. God pours out His love and peace into our hearts through our genuine fellowship together in the Holy Spirit. Or to put it another way, when we sacrifice healthy relationships with our brothers and sisters in Christ, what we sacrifice is the full benefit of experiencing God's love and peace through His people. You cannot walk in the peace of God without walking in peace with your brother.

If you have a root of bitterness in your heart (when you think about that person you get tense and your attitude turns critical), it is not an option to let the bitterness persist. If there is a root of bitterness in your heart, Satan is squatting in your heart. If someone is bitter toward you, its not acceptable

to simply say, “that's their problem.” You cannot correct their bitterness for them, but you can seek reconciliation by making sure that your sin or insensitivity has been addressed. And you might need to do it more than once.

Consider the words of Gene Getz: “Satan is the author of...insensitivity.”¹ Perhaps I can add to that, Satan is also the author of hyper-sensitivity. This is not to say we can't be overly sensitive or lack sensitivity without the devil's help. The point is to remind us that when we are oversensitive and easily offended and we cling to bitterness; or when we have been insensitive to others and fail to recognize how we have contributed to the other person's bitterness, we give the devil a stronghold in our lives, relationships, and church. There's a lot at stake. If Satan can destroy our unity in Christ, he can destroy our witness for Christ as believable.² But if we bring the gospel to bear on our relationships and conflicts, there is much to gain!

In John 17, Jesus prayed for our unity—that we would be *one* just as He and the Father are *one* so that the world may believe that Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 17:20-21). In the same prayer Jesus prayed that we would be kept from the evil one (Jn 17:15). The favor of God and the power of our witness is worth whatever it takes to be restored to one another—humbling ourselves, confessing our sin, considering our brother's admonition or rebuke, examining our perceptions, releasing our bitterness from personal hurts or offenses, and extending forgiveness toward one another.

The book of Acts records an example of church life when Jesus' prayer for unity is being answered. “And day by day continuing with *one mind* in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and *having favor with all the people*. And *the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved*” (2:46-47). “And the congregation of those who believed were of *one heart and soul*; and not one of *them* claimed that anything belonging to him was his own; but all things were common property to them. *And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all.* (4:32-33).

¹ Gene Getz, *Building Up One Another*, pg. 36.

² *Ibid.*, pg. 37.

What does our community need? What do our children need? What do we need? To witness the presence and power of Christ testifying to the truth of the gospel through our unity, harmony, and peace with one another.