

Eastern Bible Conference 2014 • Young Adults Bible Study
UNITY: Getting Along as Christ Meant Us To (Ephesians 4:3)

Study One: The Supplication of Unity and Source of Unity

What is biblical unity? What is the difference between unity and uniformity?

Sin is a disruptive force that always divides, separates, and splinters. It divides man within and against himself. It has produced the ongoing struggle we see in the Church today! In Genesis chapters 2-4, the first sin separated man from God and the second sin separated man from man.

In Ephesians 1-3 we see that unity is God's design and is a particular mark of a Christian.

What is unity?

It is a product of the finished work of Christ (Eph. 2)

Unity is of the Spirit

Unity is organic: living, vital, not mechanical; the Church is an organism, not organization

Unity is diversity, not uniformity

Unity is “oneness, a state of being;” “not about any given action, but an overall state of being”

Unity is also “a state of being combined into one, joined into a single entity, as of the parts of a whole.” It emphasizes different parts coming together.

Unanimity is focused on the nature of our decision-making

Uniformity is focused on the nature of our appearance

Unity is focused on the nature of our relationship

Unity in the Godhead:

God the Father and God the Son are each God (John 5:18, 20:27-29) and both are described as:

Eternal: John 8:56-58, 17:4-5

Same in Essence: John 14:8-11

Equal: John 5:18

One: John 10:30, 17:20-23

John 17 mentions the unity of God's people five times (v. 11 disciples, vv. 20-23 the Church).

The nature of that unity:

the worldwide body of Christians united by the shared truth about Jesus

also by the glory of a shared life; Jesus in us, the Father in Him; participate in the divine nature based on understanding who the Lord Jesus is and what He has accomplished

Understanding the sharing of truth, power, and life is what produces unity among believers.

The purpose of that unity:

John 17:21 – that the world may believe that the Father sent the Son

John 17:23 – that the world may know that the Father loves the world

When the Church begins to demonstrate the unity of faith, the unity of shared truth, shared power, and shared life, the world is hit by an inescapable impression that Jesus is Lord, that He indeed holds the key to history and to reality, that He is indeed the revelation of the invisible God.

Study Two: The Secret of Unity

What attitude is needed for unity, and how do we develop this? How is it worked out in real situations?

Ephesians 4:1-6; Ephesians 2:10-18

A combination or key for a lock is the secret way to open something of value. The secret of unity is like that. Unity is valuable. In history, God called Abraham, then made Israel His own nation; and He wanted them to be different from everybody else. Today, our world also has all manner of distinguishing factors, such as language, education, economic status, ethnicity, and so on. But now, in Christ, God took the two most divergent groups, Jews and Gentiles, and broke down those barriers.

One part of the secret to unity is this realization: “My outlook is wrong, because I have grown up looking at others as members of different groups; now, in Christ, all those groups have to be discarded.” A second part of this secret is that I base my behavior upon the realization that I have indeed been integrated with all others who are the Lord’s, abandoning myself and my reasons to be separate. Third, this secret involves the recognition that there is a united task to do—a *common* mission, a *corporate* task, not merely my own service individually.

In Ephesians 4, what attributes support this pursuit? There are six.

Internal attributes: **Lowliness** – Matthew 11:28-29; James 4:5-6, 10; 1 Peter 5:5-9
Not thinking less of myself, but thinking of myself less; humility
Personal task: humble *ourselves*; or else God will humble us (Daniel 4:37)
 Meekness – 1 Peter 2:13, Philippians 3:4-7
Accepting what God allows; strength applied delicately
Lowliness gives no offense; meekness takes no offense.

Relational attributes: **Longsuffering** – patience, endurance, “macro”-suffering
 Forbearance in love – not making big things out of differences

The secret of unity starts with my own attitudes. If we attend a seminar on unity, right away we want to know how to deal with people who we think are causing problems. But personal characteristics are the first thing to address. And all these attributes are formed in us, produced by the Spirit as we are spending time in the Word of God and seeing Christ, 2 Corinthians 3:18

Endeavoring – intentional; where we put our energy. Some translations say, “Make every effort.” The same word is used in Titus 3:12-13: Be diligent to come before winter, to send others on their way. Endeavoring is “diligent help.” As a worker of God, do your utmost to care for one another.

To keep – to maintain something in the condition it already has. Ephesians 4:4-6 give us seven anchors of this oneness; it is already supplied. We are diligently maintaining it.

What about fundamental differences between believers?

-First, are they really fundamental? Often we consider minor things to be major.

-Second, have patience. Often we like the power of influencing others, but we can wait for God to change them instead.

Study Three: The Supply for Unity

What are we to use to strengthen unity?

Ephesians 4:6-10; 11-16

This unity is already created, and we are to maintain it. How can this be done? This passage continues that theme.

All (4:6); each one (4:7); there is diversity in the supply of unity

The source is Christ in heaven (4:8-10); this is not earthly, but a heavenly supply.

Here the foundational gifts are given to the Church in order to establish unity. We also find other gifts elsewhere in the New Testament.

In 1 Peter 4:10-11, the emphasis is on “one another”—serve one another as God supplies.

The manifold grace of God: the many-faceted aspects of His grace; grace as the standard of living—it’s not just for salvation.

The key is that others are in view.

Ephesians 4:12, equipping the saints

The Church is a living organism, and the goal is maturity

The measure is “the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13)

Psalm 1:3, the tree that is supplied by brooks of water will be green and helpful for others

Ask, “What can I do?” not, “What can I get?”

Movement is not always growth. We can be tossed around like infants who have no stability, but that motion is not the same as increase.

The unity of the Spirit leads to the unity of the faith. The full expression of this is God’s eternal purpose for us, 4:11, and will only be fully realized in the future, but it is the standard we strive for now. Unity in the body will both imply and produce collective maturity among ourselves. In 1 John 3, we will collectively be like the Lord when we see Him, but this truth affects us now. As with the apostles, others will be able to see that we have spent time with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

What is maturity? It’s not synonymous with knowledge or with age. It is being Spirit-filled and Spirit-led, speaking the truth (which equals speaking Christ) in love.

Consider the “one anothers” of the Scriptures. For example:

Romans 12:16, the same mind towards one another

Romans 13:8, love one another

Romans 14:19, edify one another

These chapters are full of practical actions and attitudes that strengthen and supply unity. But a key aspect is to remember that there is a Head. If I have my own agenda apart from Christ, I will become partisan and will forget the “one anothers” or will only help some, not all. Acts 11:20-30 shows evangelists, a pastor, a teacher, and a prophet all working together for the growth of believers.

Are there hindrances to unity? Remember Matthew 19:26, with God all things are possible; and our own attitude must be, “We are brethren,” Genesis 13:8. The attitudes of one fellowship of believers towards another is exposed in our language. There is a path we believe God wants us to walk in; but there is an attitude that is appropriate toward all believers, and it does not lift up one or put down another. There should be maturity in all the family of God, 1 John 2.

Study Four: The Snares against Unity

What hinders unity? What attitudes would either foster or prevent a full expression of unity?

Ephesians 4:17-5:2

There is an old way to walk, 4:17-19. These are our natural habits.

But they are not the way of Christ, 4:20-21. We should be “learning Christ,” that is, learning His ways, His features as a human being; He was different, and we should be too.

Namely, learning Christ is a process that involves *having* put off the old self, *being* renewed, and *having* put on the new self (4:22-24). This is one of those truths where we have to be “in the good” of it, which means simply that we appreciate what God has already done and we base our actions on that position. Our old self is dead, Romans 6; it was crucified, and that’s how God sees it. Thus, any disunity is because the nature of that old self has crept back in, and I have not subdued it.

There is the renewing of our minds, Romans 12:2. The terms old and new form a very stark contrast; in Eph. 4:18, there is no life of God, yet in Christ, that life was completely displayed.

Specifically, what does this passage identify as snares against unity?

Uncontrolled wrath in me becomes a fire that burns others. Paul and Barnabas had a strong conflict, but they did not allow this to become uncontrolled wrath that burned each other. In local situations, often there are family situations or long-held grudges that burn others. Love keeps no record of wrongs (1 Corinthians 13:5, “thinks no evil”).

Our speech is full of opportunities to sin. James 3:2,8,9 indicate that the tongue cannot be tamed. Poisoned speech is a bitterness that contaminates the oasis, and the cross of Christ is needed to remind us of the death of our own selves (for illustration, Exodus 15:23ff).

The devil is the accuser of the brethren, and he doesn’t need help. Give no place to the devil; give him no beachhead, no foothold for his work.

Provocation: There may truly be wrongs done, but love is not easily provoked (1 Corinthians 13:5). The only correct response is still to be spiritual, not fleshly; the Corinthians’ partisan attitudes were proof that they were immature. Moses truly was provoked when he wrongly struck the rock in the wilderness; but though the people provoked him by their own sin, he was held accountable for his response (Numbers 20:10-11; Psalm 106:32-33).

Speech should be true, not corrupt. Evil speaking is divisive.

Bitterness is a root, and the root grows downward before you ever see the sprout above the ground. It defiles many (Hebrews 12:15). Pursue peace, avoid bitterness.

Envy and self-seeking are at the core of most or all of these snares (James 3:16). Christ’s ways are the standard; forgiveness is not about how we feel but about how we have already been forgiven.

These snares grieve the Holy Spirit! They will affect the whole atmosphere, even if we pretend our worship or times of gathering are healthy.

There are real occasions of conflict.

Sometimes there are two who just don’t get along; sometimes one person holds prominence or control over a group; sometimes there are strong disagreements about how to interpret the Scriptures. Sometimes there are those who just seem to enjoy conflict. Often conflict develops because one or more people feel they are “standing for the truth.”

- Humility, grace, and calmness are essential.

- James 1:18, be quick to hear. Listening involves my whole body language, not just my ears.
- It's certain that you are needed as one of those "joints and bands" who will supply growth and maturity for the body. Leaving a place of fellowship because of conflict will not allow God to use you for this purpose.
- It may be that you will personally be a part of the solution, as in Philippians 4:3. Perhaps the conflict will be addressed by another, but God knows how to handle it; in that case, patience and the encouragement of others will be helpful (3 John 9-12; be a Demetrius for someone else).
- Despite the conflict, affirm the relationship we have with one another. If the relationship is not established, there will be no way you can be used to help.

Study Five: The Satisfaction of Unity

Appreciate the purpose of unity, and fill our hearts with the One who has brought perfect unity.

Psalm 133

This psalm is one of 15 "Songs of Ascent" (or Degrees). In particular, Psalm 133 fits well as part of Psalms 130-134, a series which starts with redemption and ends in worship. Without unity, there really will be no true worship.

Verse 1: Declaration

"Behold" - look intently at the beauty of unity! You can have *union* by tying cats' tails together, but you won't have *unity*. True unity is something to appreciate, because it's unusual, uncommon, unique. It's pictured in how Abraham and Isaac went *together* to the place of sacrifice—the Father and the Son, our standard for unity, just as we started this subject in John 17 during the first session.

Unity is *good*, intrinsically and inherently.

It is *pleasant* outwardly; illustrations include a musical harmony; a ripe, fruitful field; and the sweetness of honey. By contrast, how bad and unpleasant is disunity!

Those who have this unity are *brethren*, who indeed ought to have unity because they are united by that family bond.

David himself is the one who enjoys this unity. The psalm alludes to the time after the death of Saul when the rest of Israel joined the tribe of Judah to follow David as their king. They saw his greatness as their true leader, and they united together under him (2 Samuel 5:2-3). To apply this, we can say the Lord Himself is the one who sees and enjoys this good and pleasant unity.

Verses 2-3: Descriptions

The oil

This fragrant oil was poured upon Aaron, the high priest; see the fragrant composition of it, Exodus 30:23-33, and the actual event of anointing, Exodus 29:7.

The anointing of Aaron, the high priest, suggests worship. For us, it is the time when Christ is acknowledged; when He ascended, the Spirit was poured out (Acts 2:32-33).

Christ the head; the beard, His honor (Isaiah 50:6 shows that plucking the beard was a way to shame the Lord); oil reaches the lowest hem of the garments, reminding us of His functions as our high priest, knowing our weaknesses and interceding for us; and the oil also flows over the stones on the shoulders and on the breastplate, uniting the individual tribes as well.

This description suggests an enormous quantity of oil! There was enough to reach and unite the entire body. Notice that the oil was not to be poured on one's flesh, misused, or improperly fabricated (Ex. 30:32-33). It's from God and for God; we must not try to imitate the unity of the Spirit by natural or fleshly means.

The dew

Dew always seems to be linked in the Scriptures with favor and blessing.

Proverbs 19:12, the king's favor is like dew

Genesis 27:28, the blessing of the dew of heaven

Deuteronomy 32:3, Moses' teaching would be refreshing like dew

Here, the dew is on Mt. Hermon and reaches to Zion. Mt. Hermon is more than 9,000 feet (2750 meters) high, located far in the north beyond the Sea of Galilee. On a clear day it could be seen from Jerusalem, 150 miles to the south. The cool refreshing air would condense on Mt. Hermon, and in the psalm the dew is of such quantity to reach Zion (Jerusalem). Possibly the thought is that the dew would evaporate and fall as rain on Jerusalem, blessing the drier region with the dew that had formed at a much higher elevation—a heavenly blessing for Jerusalem.

Dew needs gentleness. It forms at night from warm, calm air that cools. The Scriptures tell us to stand still, sit still, be still and wait for the Lord's blessing. The dew forms most heavily on living plants; those who have life receive God's blessing from the dew.

The illustrations of oil and dew both show that there is enough unity to reach the farthest extent. We might face situations that seem far too conflicted for unity to have an impact; we may feel ourselves on the fringes of the garment, so to speak, or in the driest region of the land. But the unity of the Spirit is sufficient. If conflict and division are classified as "standing for the truth," let us also remember to stand for the God's truth about unity and put His principles into practice.

U)plift and avoid negatives

N)eed of others

I)ntegrity – be what you are; live out Christ's ways

T)rust one another

Y)ield to each other

The Great Wall of China was impenetrable; but enemies breached the wall by bribing the gatekeepers, who evidently had no sense of the importance of what the wall was protecting.

God acts so that He Himself is known. We are on display not only to the world but also to angels, who look into these things by observing how we present the character of Christ.

Finally, in Revelation 5, we realize that God will indeed accomplish perfect unity, among every tribe and language and nation. Then all will see Christ alone. This is our desire now as well.