

Faith Based Unity

TO LET THE WORLD KNOW

The unity of the faith is a central concept in the New Testament. Christ, our Lord, prayed for it just before his crucifixion in

John 17:20-23

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one:²³ I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

1. UNITY WITH GOD

v. 21 – *may they also be in us*

Unity with God means:

- **knowing him**
(Jeremiah 24:7 - I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.)
- **loving him**
(Matthew 22:37-39 - 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.')
- **trusting him**
(Isaiah 26:3 - You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.)
- **obeying him**
(John 14:21 - Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.)

2. UNITY WITH EACH OTHER

v. 22 – *that they may be one as we are one*

Unity with each other:

- **Comes from being unified, first, with God & Christ**
(Romans 12:5 – in Christ we who are many form one body, & each member belongs to all the others)
- **Is forged out of our diversity**
(Ephesians 4:11-13 - It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.)
- **Requires humility**
(Philippians 2:1-3 - If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.)
- **Is a sign that we are disciples**

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(John 13:35 - By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.)

The Bible Condemns Division

The Bible condemns the opposite of unity—division—in **Galatians 5: 19-21**, where we find that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God: *19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. The largest group of the acts of a sinful nature is divisive sins: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy. Notice that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. The church cannot be strong when the members participate in these sinful acts.*

How can we help prevent divisions from occurring in our congregation?

False Teaching Interferes with Building up the Church

The New Testament teaches clearly that our job is to work toward unity and keep division away from our congregation. However, when confronted with divisive deeds or false teaching, the New Testament instructs us to take decisive and clear action. Paul tells us, in **Romans 16:17-18**, to watch out and keep away from those who cause division: *17 I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. 18 For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the minds of naive people.*

How should we handle divisiveness when it occurs? Give some practical ideas.

Gossip, Backbiting and Slander Interferes with Building up the Church

Some aim the divisive acts of a sinful nature in Gal 5 at fellow church members-- hatred, discord, jealousy. These sinful acts hurt the individual Christians at whom they are aimed and the entire local congregation. We cannot attain the unity to the faith and build up the congregation when members practice such sins. In **2 Corinthians 12:20-21**, Paul summarized the acts that are so destructive to the congregation: *"I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder."*

What is considered "Gossip"? What is Backbiting and Slander? How can we avoid these destructive sins?

The Biblical Recipe for Unity and Building up the Church

God has given the church a recipe for attaining and maintaining the unity of the faith in the local congregations.

In **Philippians 2:1-5**, described how we may be united in Christ: *2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: We should be like-minded with the mind of Christ.*

How can we strive to be "Christ like-minded"?