

An aerial photograph of a dense evergreen forest covered in snow. A dark, winding road with a yellow center line cuts through the trees, curving from the top left towards the bottom right. The overall color palette is a monochromatic blue and white, giving it a serene and wintry feel.

Moments *for* You

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Theme: Unity

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.

The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one, I in them and You in Me,

that they may become perfectly one,

so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me.” JOHN 17:20-23

THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Shortly before He went to the cross, Jesus prayed for unity among His followers: “Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have given Me, that they may be one, even as We are one” (John 17:11).

THE REASONS FOR UNITY

Jesus not only prayed for unity, but He gave the reasons that Christian unity is important: He asked that all believers may be one with the Father and the Son, “so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21). And then Jesus prayed for believers to be unified so that “the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me” (verse 23). When Christians are united in Christ, the world sees two things clearly: Jesus was sent by the Father, and Jesus loves His church.

In Romans 15:5–6, we see another, more general reason that Christian unity is important: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The bottom line is God’s glory. God’s people should be speaking with one voice in glorifying God.

THE PURSUIT OF UNITY

Christian unity comes with Christian maturity, and it is always something that we strive to attain. Paul instructs us to make every effort to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Helping us toward that unity are the gifts of the Spirit. God has given each

Christian different spiritual gifts, and their exercise in the edification of the church leads to more and more unity. One purpose of the gifts is that “we all attain to the unity of the faith” (Ephesians 4:13).

To promote Christian unity, God presents the church in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 as a living body. The body has many members, each with specialized work to do, but all the parts are united under the Head of the Body, which is Christ (see Ephesians 4:15). Christians naturally form local communities in which no one needs to rejoice or suffer alone (Romans 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26). Christians from many different backgrounds working in unity display the power of the gospel and the universality of its saving message (Galatians 3:26–28). Christians bring honor to God’s name by pursuing unity in the power of the Holy Spirit who brings us together as one through faith in Christ.

LIMITS OF UNITY

Christian unity is a virtue, but there are some things that can and should limit unity. We don’t pursue unity simply for the sake of unity; it is Christ and His truth that unite us. Scripturally, we are to separate from professed brothers and sisters in Christ who live in persistent, unrepentant sin (Matthew 18:15–17; 1 Cor. 5:1–2) and from those who teach false doctrine (Revelation 2:14–15). “Watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

As Ephesians 4:13 implies, we won’t reach full Christian unity until we attain “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” So we

probably won't fully realize Christian unity in this world. But we strive for it. The unity that faith in Christ brings extends God's love on earth and demonstrates the truth of who Jesus is. Unity in the church also foreshadows the worship in Heaven, where a great multitude "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" stands before God and cries out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:9–10).

—GotQuestions.org

FINDING UNITY IN CHRIST

Will we ever be united? Every day opposite opinions become more polarized, pulling people away from each other. Friendships are ruined, families torn apart, churches split, nations divided. While we desire to stand on our convictions, how can we remain unified at the same time?

In the Bible we read of a perfect unity. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit; three persons unified as one God. Jesus tells us that He and the Father are one (John 10:30) and that He only sought to do the Father's will (John 6:38). He also taught that the Spirit was sent into the world from the Father in the name of Jesus (John 14:26). In the Trinity we see relationships exemplified. While humans are driven apart by differences of opinion and desire, the Trinity always remains perfectly unified.

However, our problems with unity stem from a deeper issue than just differences of opinion. We are enemies to God by nature—born into, and loving, our sin (Romans 5:10,12). As a result, we deserve God's eternal wrath. We cannot expect to have unity with others when we are in rebellion to the One who defines perfect unity.

But God provided a way to be unified with Him. God the Son, Christ Jesus, in His death and resurrection made peace with us (Romans 5:1). When Christ poured out His blood on the cross, the Father was providing the way for the world to be unified with Him (Colossians 1:20). Through this atonement, we are no longer enemies of God but now can find unity with Him (Ephesians 2:18).

The Christian's unity with God is not just transactional; it is relational. In John's first letter he describes this unity as "fellowship." When we are saved, we enter into a relationship with God. We step out of the darkness and into His light. Because of Christ we can approach God's presence with full confidence (Hebrews 10:19–22). We become united with the perfect God.

Our union with God then becomes the basis for our union with others. Unity must be based on something in common, and there is no better commonality than a relationship with Christ. Despite our differences, our unity with other believers must be more than just a cold doctrinal truth. It should be a relationship defined by fellowship. We can look to the Trinity as the standard for true unity. Each person of the Trinity has a different role yet works together for one common purpose. Similarly, we can be unified with one another, like the hands and feet of one body working together (1 Corinthians 12:12).

We will always have opinions. If we come to a conclusion after prayer, studying, and meditation we should stand firm in it. But we live in a world where opinions are driving us apart. "Do two walk together unless they have agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Let us walk in unity, in agreement that Jesus is Savior and Lord! —Erik Rasmussen

EVIDENT UNITY

“That they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me” (John 17:21).

There’s a very real sense in which this petition already has been fulfilled. Every person who is a Christian is in Christ, so if you are in Christ and I am in Christ, there is a real unity between us by virtue of our common union with Him. This is true for all genuine believers. Even though we may differ on this point or that point, there is a real unity that binds us together—and that unity should be evident to the world.

C. S. Lewis tells of perusing the writings of great Christians from history during his student days. He read Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, Thomas à Kempis, and others, and while he recognized that all of these people had certain nuances of differences between them, he couldn’t get over the oneness that kept coming through their testimony as to the truth of the gospel.

Jesus prayed that those who would believe on Him would have a unity that unbelievers could see, that they might learn various things. He asked the Father that believers would “become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You loved Me” (John 17:23). The love, concern, and compassion that we have one for another should be so atypical of the world that they serve as definitive proof that Jesus was not merely a great moral teacher but the second person of the Trinity, sent by God. This unity should also testify to the world that God loves believers just as He loves Christ. The clear demonstration of a supernatu-

ral work going on in the midst of the people of God shows the love, favor, and grace of God.

Incidentally, believers themselves need a deeper grasp of the love of God for them. In His tender mercies, God has an incredible capacity to love the unlovely. How do I know that? He knows every ugly part of my soul and of my life, yet He loves me. How can that be? We always have to understand that the love He has for us is not because we are inherently lovable. He loves us in the Son, and the same love that He pours out to His Son, He pours out to those who are in the Son. This love that He has for the Son is the only reason I can give as to why God chose to save me.

—R. C. Sproul

IS CHRIST ENOUGH?

As long as sin has existed, there has existed the wicked desire to degrade, diminish, and devalue others. In our sinfulness and depravity, we act hatefully toward others. The Bible says that human beings are made in God’s image and likeness (Genesis 1:26–27), meaning that, in some limited way, God has made us to be like Him and to bear His representative image on the earth. It is God, then, who places inherent value on human beings, and every person is worth the full measure of dignity and honor God’s image gives them.

Therefore, every act of hatred toward others in an attack against the image of God. Though the Bible teaches that we are all one race of people, even one family (Genesis 10), we suppress that truth in unrighteousness and believe the lie that other people are less valuable than ourselves.

Today, we hear a lot about *reconciliation*. And in the Christian discussion

surrounding social justice, there have been several ideas put forward regarding racial reconciliation. How do we pursue reconciliation? The world, apart from Christ, will accomplish only a small measure of unity afforded it by the common grace of God. But for Christians, there is a loving unity that goes deeper than clothes and culture and skin; it is a unity paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

REDEEMED IN CHRIST

In his letter to the Colossian church, the Apostle Paul opposes a series of false notions in the church, primarily, the devaluing of Jesus Christ as God and Savior. Weighed down by Jewish legalism, worldly philosophy, and pagan mysticism, the church was buckling under the weight of false religion, and at risk of splintering into disunity, and even apostasy.

In the first two chapters of the letter, Paul exalts Christ, who had been dethroned in the hearts and minds of the people, and sets Him high and above every false system of religion wreaking havoc on the church. Having been rescued out of their former life of sin, Paul notes that God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:13–14). In Christ, our old self is gone, the record of our sin debt is cancelled out, and nailed to Christ’s cross (2:13–14). In the regeneration of the believer, there is a renewal of the *imago Dei*, rooted in the true knowledge of God (3:10).

As new creations (2 Corinthians 5:17), we are placed into the church—a body of redeemed, united believers—a picture of a renewed humanity which harkens back to Eden, yet still marred by the Fall. In the present age, we experience a small measure

of this renewal. In the coming age, however, we will be participants in a full renewal of humanity in the new heavens and new earth. This renewal, while only a microcosm of what it will be in the future, is meant to have an impact on our present life. It should govern our moral conduct, and cause us to lay aside the deeds of our old self (Colossians 3:8–9), putting on the deeds of the new self (3:10–17).

CHRIST OVERCOMES EARTHLY DISTINCTIONS

Seizing on this theme of spiritual renewal, Paul is quick to note the reality of equality within the body of Christ. In setting their minds on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1–2), believers are exhorted to see all of life, and one another, in light of how they will be seen in Heaven. “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all” (3:11).

OLD BARRIERS REMOVED

First, he notes that “there is not Greek and Jew.” In the Old Testament, God had mandated that Israel set themselves apart for holiness, so as not to adopt elements of pagan culture. But by the time of Jesus, the Jews considered all non-Jews (Gentiles/Greeks) to be unclean and un-touchable. And while they were right to reject the pagan elements, Gentiles themselves were not inherently unsavable. When Christ came, He offered the gospel to *all* peoples—“to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16; 10:12). Regardless of background, nationality, or ethnicity, no people group is beyond salvation.

RELIGIOUS CEREMONY SET ASIDE

Next, Paul notes the lack of distinction between those who were ceremonially “circumcised” and “uncircumcised.” In the Mosaic covenant, all Jewish males were required to be

circumcised. But for those who come to Christ in the New Covenant, the requirement is gone. No religious ritual, observance, or ceremony must be undertaken in order to be saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OVERCOME

If the Jews struggled at first to accept uncircumcised Gentiles into their number, who did the Gentiles struggle to accept? Answer: the “barbarians” and “Scythians.” At a time when Greco-Roman culture embraced sophistication and civility, those who lived on the outskirts of society were derided. The “barbarians” constituted people of low class; uncivilized and uncultured. And the worst of the worst were the Scythians, a savage group of nomads known for attacking and pillaging unsuspecting peoples. The Greeks thought of the Scythians the way most Westerners think of Jihadi terrorists. But even those who society deems the worst of the worst are still not beyond the redeeming love of Christ.

SOCIAL BOUNDARIES CROSSED

The last group listed in Colossians 3:11 pertains to those of certain social or economic classes. In the first century, approximately one-third of all people living in the Roman Empire were slaves—a working-class group of individuals with no rights or privileges. The rest of the Roman citizens were considered “freemen.” When the gospel went out, both slaves and freemen responded in faith, and the early church became a melting pot of believers from all social classes. In fact, Paul even instructs the church on how to treat one another in light of these relationships (Colossians 3:22–4:1; cf. Philemon; Ephesians 6:5–9). Regardless of the societal standing, there is no distinction between brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ.

MEN AND WOMEN VALUED EQUALLY

One additional group that Paul does not mention in Colossians is mentioned in Galatians 3:28—that of male and female. While gender roles are defined by God, there is no hierarchy between sexes within the realm of salvation. Both men and women are equal in value to God, and are co-inheritors of His kingdom in Christ.

While God has created human beings to be unique in their own way, He has brought all believers together in unity. What is it that binds us all together? What breaks down all barriers and dividing walls? It is none other than Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS ALL

Paul concludes his statement about unity in the body with “Christ is all, and in all.” At first glance, it seems like an obscure statement, almost pantheistic. But when read in light of the rest of Scripture, the meaning becomes clearer.

The pinnacle of Paul’s letter to the Colossians comes in chapter 1, verses 15 through 20. Known as “The Hymn of the Incarnation,” the apostle masterfully extols the supremacy and majesty of Jesus Christ in only a few short statements. In reading the paragraph, one thing becomes abundantly clear: Christ is all-powerful, all-sufficient, wholly-supreme, true God, and sovereign King. In verses 16–17, we see Christ’s sustaining power over all creation, followed by His headship over the church.

Then Paul notes that Christ was sent “to reconcile to Himself all things ... making peace by the blood of His cross” (v. 20). Not only is Christ sufficient to bind all of the created order together, He is also sufficient to bind together every Christian believer. And through the regenerating, indwelling, and transforming ministry

of the Holy Spirit, Christ has placed Himself in all believers (cf. John 15:1–17, 17:20–26; Galatians 2:20).

While many would say that reconciliation comes through man-made efforts, the Bible proclaims that true reconciliation exists in those who have first been reconciled to God, and thus to one another in Christ. As John MacArthur has written, “There is no place for man-made barriers in the church since Christ is all, and in all. Because Christ indwells all believers, all are equal. He breaks down all racial, religious, cultural, and social barriers, and makes believers into one new man (Ephesians 2:15).” In short, Christ is enough. —Nate Pickowicz

A PLEA FOR UNITY

People say sometimes that the prayer of our Lord for unity has not been answered and they point to the many different sects and denominations among professed Christians. Of these divisions we very well are ashamed. And yet, despite them all, wherever real Christians get together they enjoy fellowship in the precious things of Christ. We are all one in Christ. The fact that Satan, our great adversary, has sent members of the same family to quarreling with each other is sad indeed, and should cause us to bow our heads in humiliation and self-judgment before God. As our unity is manifested in a practical way, our testimony has power with the world. On the other hand, nothing is so calculated to stumble the unsaved as finding that Christians are unkind and quarrelsome in their dealings with each other.

How quickly we realize that we are one when the hour of trouble and persecution comes. A fine old Armenian Christian who was greatly grieved by the divisions among Christians in

America said to me one time, as the tears started in his eyes, “If they were exposed to the awful persecutions we had to know in Armenia, they would learn to value one another more.”

A missionary wrote to me lately and spoke of meeting another missionary of an altogether different group of believers in a foreign land where he was laboring. He said, “Any kind of a Christian looks mighty good to me down here.”

May we realize more and more our unity and act in accordance with it, so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus to be the Savior of mankind. Every time an unbeliever hears you making an unkind remark about another Christian, you are suppressing your own testimony. In the second century, when believers were characterized by love of the brethren, Tertullian wrote that even the heathen exclaimed with admiration, “Behold how these Christians love one another.” —H. A. Ironside

YOUR PART IN WORKING TOWARD UNITY

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same [tuning] fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow” (A. W. Tozer, The Pursuit of God).

DAILY FELLOWSHIP IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Acts 2:46-47 describes the early Christian church: “Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

Can you imagine what it must have been like? What a fellowship they must have had! What a connection within the body of Christ! Every single day they got together to worship, fellowship and grow together. Is it any wonder that people were being saved *every day*?

This is such a far cry from many churches where the vast majority of believers only get together on Sundays. Even the “faithful few” are adding one, maybe two extra days to serve alongside their fellow believers.

UNITY MEANS BEING VULNERABLE

I understand why some Christians like it the way it is. They come and go, barely rubbing shoulders with anyone and keeping their lives at a distance. After all, it’s a very vulnerable thing to invest time, energy, and emotions into others. It means showing who we really are. It means putting others first and not getting our own way.

It takes work. When you consider how much conflict we read of in the New Testament, it might not seem worth it. So many believers choose rather to wander through life doing their own thing and not getting involved in a local church.

UNITY OPENS OURSELVES UP TO PAIN

I can also hear some saying, “You don’t know what I’ve been through and the hurt that *those people* in my church have caused me.” Yes we get hurt by others. Yes we find ourselves having to deal with pain when friends fail us. There is no way to avoid it. Why? Because I know that I am also going to fail others and cause hurt.

No matter how careful we are, not a single one of us will always be able to avoid offending others. At times we say the wrong things, we have the wrong attitudes, and our actions fall short of building others up. So it only makes sense that since we hurt

others that others will hurt us. Often it’s not intentional, but it still happens.

UNITY TAKES EFFORT

I’ve been reminded recently from Ephesians 4 that to have unity takes a lot of effort. It won’t be an easy road, but it is entirely worth it! It is also what the Lord has called us to. And anything He calls us to will have great reward when it is achieved.

Can it be done? Yes! Unity is not some mystical vapor that vanishes the moment we reach out for it. Christ, the head of the church, has equipped His people with tools (gifts) that when used for His glory help to build up and strengthen the body. It can be done!

UNITY REQUIRES WILLINGNESS

The question is whether or not we are willing to put in our part and do all we can to reach and maintain unity with our fellow believers. Or are we going to take the easy road and expect others to serve us? Selfishness has no place in a unified church.

It’s tiring to always serve and build up others especially when we don’t often see anything in return. But I’m encouraged by Paul when he said, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). Unity can only be achieved in the strength of Christ. In our own strength we fail.

UNITY MUST START WITH ME!

Is there strife and division in your local church? Are you the problem? It’s very possible you are. Only an emptying of selfish personal ambitions and desires can start the process of healing and unity. May we all come to that place where we go before the Lord in humble submission and commit ourselves to unity, no matter the cost.

It’s time we got to work and started building His church. And it starts inside our own hearts. —Crawford Paul