

Week 6: Walking in Unity and Fellowship

Jonathan Srock / General

Living in the Last Days Life Group

Description: The world is full of division and hate. But you expect that from the world. The problem is that we face division in the Church. What does the Bible say about unity and fellowship with other believers? Is there a situation in which we must allow division or separate from other believers? How do you deal with false doctrines and false teachers?

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Teaching (45 minutes)

Dealing with Division

Division in the World

There are many divisions in the world. They range from political, Social, relational, and spiritual. Some people would like nothing more than to drag us into these divisions.

Political division needs no explanation. In one sense, there must be political division for there to be compromise. The two major parties of American politics must work together if anything is to get done.

We have seen in recent days political division become even more divided, as much of the country has been divided over a number of issues.

Political division can invade the Church and be a source of contention between believers. This should never be, but it is sadly the case. The Bible gives us guidelines on what we can be different politically in.

We must widely expect that members of different political parties can still be Christians. We must love one another, and this must go beyond petty political differences. We must not provoke one another needlessly.

Social divisions can be along the lines of any number of issues. Racial divisions may be among the most common today. But people can socially divide on a number of philosophies of life. They stand beyond political division but can spill over into politics, or vice versa.

Any social issue can be made into a divisive one. Everything from views on the environment to issues of drugs and alcohol are social issues that can easily create division among us.

These, like political issues, can invade the church and divide us socially. This is one reason I believe Paul left us a gem when he describes issues between stronger and weaker brothers. They can help us navigate social differences.

Relational division is the painful process of separating people from one another. This can happen in families, between groups of people (clubs, memberships, etc.), and even within groups of people with the same interests.

Jesus told us divisions between family members can happen because of Him ([Luke 12:52-53](#)). Paul says that Jesus is a stumbling block and foolishness to the world ([1 Corinthians 1:22](#)).

We must make sure Jesus is what divides us rather than our own personalities or differences of opinion in our families. We are also called to live in peace with everyone as much as it can be done on our part ([Romans 12:18](#)).

Believe it or not, the world has divisions in spirituality. **Spiritual divisions** go far beyond the difference in world religions. It can start with world religions.

Spirituality is a word co-opted by the world. When they talk about spirituality, in many cases it does not refer to Christianity.

Even among polytheists (Hinduism, Pantheism, etc.) there are disagreements. Spirituality itself is divisive. The host of “gods” in the world one to control the world. These are the dark spiritual forces and demonic spirits that controlled the hearts of sinful people whether they realize it or not.

Division in the Church

Division in the world is expected. But division in the Church is another matter entirely. You would think Christians would get along and there would not be divisions among us, but there are sometimes.

What we must address is why there is division among groups of Christians or individual Christians. Paul addressed division in several churches including the Corinthian and Philippian churches.

For instance, in the Corinthian church, people were dividing over who they followed, whether it be Jesus, Paul, and Apollos ([1 Corinthians 3:1-4](#)).

1 Corinthians 3:1-4 ESV

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not being merely human?

In the Philippian church, there was a disagreement between two prominent women ([Philippians 4:2](#)). There are different kinds of division in the church, so we must address what I categorize as good division and bad division).

Good Division (Doctrinal Issues)

There are some examples of good division in the Church in the Bible. One such division is over doctrinal issues.

Doctrine and teaching should not divide the Church, but it does based on what is being taught and believed. For instance, Christians divide over "minor doctrines," like how and when to water baptize people.

We have divisions called denominations throughout Protestantism. But the church has been dividing doctrinally for a long time. If not doctrinally, sometimes it is cultural. Take, for instance, the several historical schisms between the East and the West. Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and several others have divided historically.

Some of our divisions doctrinally happen because we have different words for the same things. Some of the historical divisions between the Church have

happened because of doctrinal disagreements over a single concept, like the two natures of Christ.

Dividing simply to divide is not good division. But there are times when we must divide from others over doctrinal issues. One thing we must remember is that there is Orthodox Christian belief that is challenged by cults and denied by so-called Christians. Dividing from these is a good thing.

Majoring in the Majors and Minor in the Minors

Within Protestantism specifically, there are many denominations. These denominations over time have separated over minor doctrines.

Christian should not divide over major doctrines, like the divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, the second coming, salvation, and Scripture.

There are secondary, or minor doctrines that usually cause the division that happens between denominations, such as the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the proper understanding of communion, water baptism, tribulation and end times views, and a host of others.

We can major in the majors and minors in the minors especially when we are together with Christians of other denominational backgrounds. We do not have to pick fights doctrinally.

For instance, if I preach in a church that is not Pentecostal, I do not talk about Pentecostal things. There is so much more in Scripture to talk about amongst other Christians.

Every Christian must agree on the major theological views of Christianity. You cannot have someone who doesn't believe in the Trinity as a Christian.

But you can have Christians who disagree on the minor points of theology and Scripture. They are still Christians, but they disagree on "the little things." Do we still need to make so many denominations? Probably not.

The reason we have so many denominations is that it is easier to find long-term unity among people who believe the same things you do and can maintain that unity and fellowship. If you're constantly defending your position on minor doctrinal views, there is no true long-term unity.

The problem is when we cannot have short-term unity among believers from different denominations and different minor doctrinal views. That should not be. It might even be helpful for you to visit churches and spend time with Christians who have different minor doctrinal views than you. It could widen your scope and help you to see different minor perspectives.

Dealing with False Teachers/Teaching/Doctrines

We can create unity through diversity. What I mean by this is that we should be united against false teachers, false doctrines, and false teaching. Things like cults that do not have Christian doctrine as their guiding principles are not Christian.

We cannot find unity among Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons. They are not Christians. In one way or another, cults may seem Christian but they do not hold to the same Orthodox major doctrines as we do. We cannot have fellowship with them.

We also cannot have fellowship with false teachers who pervert the gospel and the Word of God. If there teaching views that are not found in Scripture, views that are contrary to Scripture, or views that somehow twist and pervert Scripture, we should be united against them.

To be divisive against false teachers and false doctrines is good division. False teachers and teaching was not acceptable to the apostles and the Church in Scripture, and it must not become acceptable to us.

Any teaching or teacher that presents itself against Scripture in any way should be turned out of the church. They will draw others away from Christ and the Bible, and we cannot have that. We must have the same hard-line stance the apostles had against false teachers in the Bible.

We do not have to be rude about it, but we cannot be nice either. If we show even a hint of "understanding" them, we are opening the door for others to think what they are teaching or saying is okay. It is not, and we need to be as clear as possible. If they will not leave willingly, they must be kicked out.

Along with false teaching and false teachers, we should not accept Christians who live one way among Christians and another way in the world. This should

not cause immediate division, but if the Christian refuses to align their lifestyle with biblical truth, we cannot have long-term fellowship in unity with them.

Bad Division (Differences in Personalities and Perspectives)

If the Church is separated by strong personalities or differing perspectives, especially those things that divide the world, this is bad division. Bad division consists of everything where we separate from one another because we just don't like each other.

Those parts of our personalities that are too strong for others we should be able to keep away from one another. I do not have to be strong-willed while I am with people that are turned off by my personality.

You should not spend a lot of time with a person who does not like your personality. There is enough diversity in the Church that we do not have to spend time with people we don't get along with for reasons of personality or perspective differences.

These divisions between people do happen in the Church. Believe it or not, they happened in the Bible too. For instance, there's an example of Paul and Barnabas ([Acts 15:36-41](#)). After John Mark had abandoned them, Barnabas was willing to take him out again where Paul was not. Paul and Barnabas actually separated over this issue and Paul took Silas with him on his next journey.

We know later that Paul chose to work with John Mark once again, so that schism was resolved. I don't believe Paul and Barnabas could no longer be friends, and they were certainly still Christians. Christians can disagree with one another and still remain Christians.

Another example is two women in the Philippian church who either had a strong personality disagreement with one another, or a disagreement over something minor. No one knows who they were in the church but we know they had a strong enough disagreements that Paul addressed it at the end of a letter addressed to the Philippian church.

Paul does not often call out people in a letter to the whole church. He tended to write letters to individuals to deal with individuals. But in the letter to the

Philippians, Paul calls out Euodia and Syntyche for their differences with one another ([Philippians 4:2-3](#)). Look at how Paul talks about these two women:

Philippians 4:2-3 ESV

I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

He entreats both of them. He urges them to stop their conflict. He wants them to “agree in the Lord.” He also calls on a “loyal yokefellow” to help them come to agreement. This may have been a person known to Paul in them who had their respect in the church, and it could be a proper name.

Paul still sees these women as Christians despite their dispute. He says they have labored with him side-by-side for the gospel. He refers to them as fellow workers. And most importantly, Paul says their names are in the Book of Life. Despite their differences, Paul does not say they have lost their faith or are not Christians any longer.

We do well to take Paul’s tact and approach when we have disagreements in the church based on personality conflicts and differences of other natures. We should not say the other person is an unbeliever or any other hyperbolic language. We must treat one another with the love of Christ.

Whoever they were, their division was probably affecting the rest of the Philippian church. Perhaps they were two leaders of two house churches. We do not know this side of heaven, but Paul found it necessary to address them personally in a corporate letter.

A third example of Christians having division or separating is when Peter and Paul had a dispute because of Peter seeming to separate himself from the Gentile Christians when Jewish brothers came to visit ([Galatians 2:11-14](#)).

Longing for Fellowship

Unity in the Spirit ([Ephesians 4:1-3](#))

Paul gives keys to how we achieve the unity of the Spirit amongst Christians. In [Ephesians 4:1-3](#), he outlines how we can achieve unity. It is not easy and it must be done through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. **Walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Jesus.** The original language word for “in a manner worthy” is just one word that points to Jesus being pleased with our actions, words, and thoughts. Are you bringing worth to Jesus in these areas of your life? We represent Jesus in the world and the world is watching everything we do.
2. **Humility, gentleness, and patience.** When you are humble, you do not seek the high road, or to control a person or situation. You put others first. When you react with gentleness, it takes the tension out of the air. Having patience with other people, especially in a disagreement or misunderstanding, defuses the situation and disarms the people that have a problem with you.
3. **Bear with one another in love.** When you bear with one another in love, it changes the way you look at other people. When you have unconditional love, you are willing to take the blows you face because you love that person. You face the challenges the other person has. You become a resource instead of an adversary.
4. **Seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.** When you hold the unity of the Spirit and a high regard, you will look to His leadership. You will not try to solve your problems or the problems of others with your resources. Seek the Spirit and what He is doing in the situation. A person who seeks unity is a peacemaker and seeks peace between all parties. This does not mean people stop fighting. It means they work in harmony with everyone.

When you follow these steps, you will most certainly see the unity of the Spirit in your relationships and the volatile situations you face. Be part of the solution instead of part of the problem. You need to work with the Spirit toward this unity.

Unity does not happen automatically. We must work toward it and maintain it through these steps. You will return to this process repeatedly in your life. You are always facing new experiences, challenges, and situations, and you are working with different people in different contexts toward unity.

Paul mentions the unity of the Spirit as something we are all working toward ([Ephesians 4:12-16](#)).

Ephesians 4:12-16 ESV

to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Paul prefaces his talk on unity in the Spirit and in the body of Christ by talking about the five ministry/leadership gifts of the Spirit. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers ([Ephesians 4:11](#)).

These are people gifted in these areas of ministry and leadership, but are themselves gifts to the Church. These gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Church aid in its growing into unity in the Spirit. These gifts and people with these gifts achieve this goal.

These ministry gifts have two functions:

1. Equip the saints for the work of ministry
2. Building up the body of Christ

These will result in the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, Jesus. Unity is achieved by:

- **Christian Maturity.** Maturity means we are growing deeper in Christ and becoming the whole people God meant us to be as His creations.

- **Measure of the full stature of Christ.** We are becoming more like Jesus, being conformed to His image, and looking like Him. We identify more with Jesus than with anyone else.
- **Not tossed around by every wind of teaching.** The false teaching does not grab our attention or make us wonder about what the Bible says. We are united against false teaching and do not allow it to knock us off course.
- **Growing up in every way into Christ.** We speak the truth in love. In every measurable aspect, we are becoming more like Jesus. We work together with the rest of the body of Christ, knowing her place and doing our part.

Unity in Diversity

We can have unity and still be diverse. There are different races, views, and backgrounds among those in the body of Christ, but we're still in the body of Christ.

The world wants to separate and divide us because of our diversity. They will use it for their purposes but we must work together and achieve unity despite our diversity.

We can maintain unity and gain much from the diversity within the body of Christ. Different backgrounds, races, and personalities make our experiences and problem solving richer and wiser.

To the extent that we are diverse in the interferes with the unity of the body of Christ we must suppress our diversity in favor of unity, but this does not mean you're not sure on person anymore or that you must not interact with your personality, skills, and resources.

It simply means you set aside your diverse traits in favor of maintaining unity. Let the Holy Spirit guide you when you're diversity will help the body and when you are desire for unity is the better choice to serve the body.

How to Achieve Unity (Philippians)

I'll give some of the same advice to the Philippian church to maintain unity. Although you can't see it the first time you read Philippians, you will notice the

more you study the letter that Paul was dealing with some division within the Philippian church.

Their division was probably not as pronounced as the divisions at Corinth. But division does not serve the body of Christ. At least, it is a distraction. At most, it is eating the church from the inside out, destroying people and relationships, and must be dealt with immediately and decisively.

We've already talked about how Paul dealt with the two women who were at odds with one another. But when you look at the whole letter, you see how much Paul appeals to the Philippians to follow his example of humility and gentleness.

Paul displays much tact and how he deals with the whole church. He uses the example of Jesus emptying Himself and being humble ([Philippians 2:1-11](#)) as how to live in community.

He was teaching the Philippians, and us, as Jesus's disciples to focus on Jesus and make pursuing Him our ultimate goal ([Philippians 3:12-4:1](#)).

In the final chapter, he calls the disciples of Jesus to rejoice in Jesus (focusing on Him instead of your problems and problem people you face), be reasonable in all your dealings, to take your anxious thoughts and situations to the Lord in prayer, and to put your thoughts toward good and godly things ([Philippians 4:4-9](#)).

Paul shows by example how to be content in whatever situation we face ([Philippians 4:10-20](#)).

Fellowship As the Focus of Unity

The word "fellowship" is special and means to have similarity with, to share something with, to have something in common with, and to partner or have partnership in something with someone.

Fellowship could be considered the ultimate "unity word." Throughout the New Testament, New Testament writers explain the things we have in common with one another and with God. It is why we have unity and get along with one another.

When you are in fellowship with other Christians, you remember that, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – when Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all” ([Ephesians 4:4-6](#)).

Using the word “one” reminds the Ephesians and all Christians who read the letter that we have a whole lot more in common than we don’t have in common. We have a fellowship that is unlike the world.

The way I like to remind Christians that they have more in common with other Christians than with the world is to talk about going to church as, “Stepping out of the cold, dark world and into the light, warmth, and love of your spiritual family.”

Fellowship with God and Saints

Fellowship is one of John’s favorite words and he opens his first letter by talking about what it means to have fellowship with God and the saints.

1 John 1:5–10 ESV

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

He begins by talking about the character of God as being light without darkness, truth without lies, and righteousness without wickedness.

We must measure up to God’s character and qualities. So John gives examples of how we fall short of fellowship with God and Christians.

A couple of cliff notes may be helpful. John uses the word “walk” to denote a lifestyle. He uses conditional statements that hold the “if” part to be possibly true and the “then” to be absolutely true.

- We cannot say we walk with God while we walk in darkness (wickedness, sinfulness, and evil)([1 John 1:6](#)).
- We must walk in the light (righteousness, godliness, and the truth) ([1 John 1:7](#)).
 - If this is the case, we have fellowship with one another.
 - God's truth lives in us.
 - Jesus's blood continually cleanses us from all sin.
- We cannot say we have no sin (1 [John 1:8](#)).
 - This is a person who refuses to confess sin.
 - We will momentarily sin but we will not have a lifestyle of sin.
 - You could always understand this to be you have no sin ever to confess, and therefore don't need Jesus as your Savior.
 - We deceive ourselves about sin.
 - God's truth is not in us.
- Confession of our sin leads to Jesus's forgiveness ([1 John 1:9](#)).
 - One of the greatest truths and promises of Scripture, that Jesus always forgives when we confess.
 - Jesus both forgiveness and cleanses us from our sin.
 - You could understand this in light of [1 John 1:7](#) that a person walking in the light is confessing sin and receiving Jesus's cleansing from sin.
- We cannot say we have not sinned ([1 John 1:10](#)).
 - This can be a sin we have momentarily sinned or referring to never sin and not meaning Jesus's sacrifice.
 - We make God a liar.
 - God's word is not in us.

Barriers to Fellowship

I will just list several barriers to fellowship we find throughout the New Testament.

- Pride and arrogance
- Sin
- Disinterest in another person's plight
- Strong-willed personality
- "Watching the world burn" mentality
- Conflict seekers
- Deceit and lying about yourself or others
- Thwarting leadership
- Defending yourself at the expense of others

Discussion (30 minutes)

Application (10 minutes)