

How to create and maintain unity

Galatians 5:14-15 **The whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But if you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.** Satan hates God and therefore he hates God's people, the church. His great plan for the church is to cause Christians, true believers who ought to be together in the gospel, to find ways of disagreeing among themselves, to divide, to be bitter and jealous, and ultimately to "bite and devour one another". Where there is division we find the hand of our enemy.

Psalms 133 says: **How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there (the place where there is unity) the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.** Unity brings forth blessing and life, meanwhile division, disunity brings curse and death.

The unity of amongst Christians is so important that Jesus prayed for it. John 17:21-22 **I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one... I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one.** As a father wants to see his children united, God wants to see the same in His Church.

We have the power to build and maintain unity as we have power to destroy it. Today we will explore ways we can build and maintain unity. And although we apply these principles specifically to the Church, they can be applied to your family, marriage or business.

1. To build and maintain unity we must **seek to build each other up.** Romans 14:19 **Let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up.** What kind of difference would it make if everyone in our church made a decision to encourage one another on a weekly basis! Life's tough and there are enough discouraged people in the world. There is always someone around you that needs to be built up, encouraged. Encouragement is like the fuel that gets you going, meanwhile discouragement does the opposite.

Every day we have 3 choices: we can choose to use our words and actions to build up others, to discourage others, or we can choose to do neither, which is what most people decide to do. What a waste!

Believe me when I say that when you commit yourself to build up others you'll build up yourself, nothing to lose and much to gain. We need to become a church of encouragers, and that begins with a personal decision of looking daily for opportunities to do so. Make this decision and your life and the life of others will change forever. Satan will hate this because it builds up the Church.

2. To build and maintain unity you have to **recognize the value of every person.** Colossians 3:13 **Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.** Romans 15:7 **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.** Every church is made up of a broad range of personalities. Inevitably people will collide. But while you may disagree with others, you must never forget that Christ died for them. That shows how valuable and how important they are. Christ accepts you unconditionally and non-judgmentally, therefore you must accept others in the way that Christ accepts you.

The church is a family and some of the members are more mature than others, some still have a long way to go, but in spite of all, we are all part of the church family and we don't have the right to hurt people for whom Christ died! Live a life that demonstrates that God values everyone.

3. To build and maintain unity you have to **focus on what's really important.** 2 Corinthians 4:18 commands: **Fix your eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.** But what do we do all the time? We fix our eyes on what is seen, the temporary. Many times even Christians live only for this world. They seek comfort and wealth, forgetting that when we die everything stays behind. The things that the

world lives and dies for are temporary; the things of God last forever. The Lord will reward and judge you by the way you live your life. Are you living for what is really important? The most important things of all are related to the kingdom of God.

On the other hand I have observed that most churches that split do it over things that are given the importance they shouldn't have. Also many people leave churches because of minor and many times stupid issues motivated by pride. Do not get angry about little things that do not really matter. Focus on what's really important and help build and maintain unity in the Church.

4. To build and maintain unity make sure you **don't make others stumble**. Romans 14.13 **let's stop condemning each other. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not cause another believer to stumble and fall**. When my liberty limits the work of God, then we've got a problem. As a Christian you need to be aware that there are some things you could probably get away with but you can't because others are watching you.

As we saw last week, the decisions you make, the values that you defend, your lifestyle and your words, are observed by all and people pay attention. They know when your life contradicts what you say you believe, they know when you have two faces. Be careful that your liberty to do certain things doesn't become a stumbling block for others.

5. To build and maintain unity: **don't force your opinions on others**. Romans 14.12-13 **Why do you condemn another believer? Why do you look down on another believer? Remember, we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ...Yes, each of us will give a personal account to God. So let's stop condemning each other**. Often we confuse personal or cultural preferences, or teachings of men, to what God's Word clearly teaches, and we want others to act and think like us. That was what happened with the Pharisees in Jesus' time.

Romans 12:18 commands **As far as it depends on you, if it is possible, live at peace with all men**. Follow this principle if you want to build and maintain unity: In essentials, unity; in what's not essential, liberty; in all things, love.

6. To build and maintain unity **judge yourself more than you judge others**. Mathew 7.3 **Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?** If you were to spend more time considering your own sin, and less time considering the sins of others, you would never be so quick to judge and to separate yourself from other believers. Unfortunately this is one of the problems that divides the body of Christ out, and leads people to separate from the Church. If you deal with your own sins instead of targeting those of others you will help build and maintain the unity of the Church.

7. To build and maintain unity **take the initiative to seek peace and reconciliation**. When one becomes a member of our church the person signs a membership covenant with us and God, but many forget what they promise. It says that I **WILL PROTECT THE UNITY OF MY CHURCH** by refusing to gossip and by resolving conflicts using Matthew 18:15-17 **If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector**.

You are a Christian today only because God was the first to seek peace with you. You are now called, better required, to follow his example and be the first to seek after peace and to pursue and maintain unity.

8. To build and maintain unity you have to realize that **there is a high price to pay for disunity**. In Mark 3:25 Jesus said that: **a house divided against itself...cannot stand**. Satan is in the business of splitting marriages, families, friends, leaders and particularly churches so that he can steal our call and our effectiveness and make us irrelevant. An irrelevant church is usually a church that isn't united and therefore lost the power that unity brings.

When relationships break down, disagreement will follow, and every disagreement between Christians is a triumph of Satan. If you descend into disunity, you hand Satan a victory. Maintain peace and deny him the triumph! Either you are furthering the work of God or of Satan. If we count the high the cost of disunity we will do everything to maintain unity.

9. To build and maintain unity you must **understand the power of walking and working together**. Jesus' prayer in John 17:23 was: **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me**. Our unity is a witness to the world, it shows them God's love. We can't be united with God without being united with one another because God will always ask of you to live in peace and united with one another.

When we are divided it is God's loss and your loss, and it is Satan's gain. When you don't walk in love with other Christians, when you don't work with your spiritual family, we all lose. Christians united together are difficult to separate, difficult to destroy. Snowflakes are one of nature's most fragile things, but just look at what they can do when they stick together.

It is when you isolate yourself by disrupting or denying unity that you are most at risk. The same way that lions attack an animal that leaves the pack, the enemy will always make you separate from the body. Watch out-- you are about to be eaten! Understand the power of walking and working together.

10. To build and maintain unity **be humble**. James 4:6 **God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble**. Matthew 23:12 **those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted**. Humility produces peace among Christians, meanwhile pride divides. Humility prepares you to serve instead of be served, to overlook an offense, to pursue unity, to wish others to succeed and to respond with joy and grace. Humility will always build and maintain unity.

Conclusion - If you're a Christian you are called to build up, to encourage others, and to create and maintain unity. If you're not doing that, you're not fulfilling your call.

Everyone wants to be loved, and when there is genuine love people are attracted. We are an unperfected church but we want to be a healthy church because everything that is healthy grows.

If you apply to your life what you have heard today you'll help our Church fulfill his calling. You don't have to feel anything special in order to apply these teachings. What you have to do is to understand that you are called to create and maintain unity and make the decision to apply what you have learned.