



Combined Faith

Brings Increase

Philip. 2:2

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded,
having the same love, being of one accord,
of one mind.

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Forward

All believers have one thing in common—faith in Christ. On this essential truth the church finds unity.

One Holy Spirit into one body of believers, the church, baptizes all believers.

We don't lose our individual identities, but we have an overriding oneness in Christ.

God has chosen us as his own, and we have been called to represent him to others.

Remember that your value comes from being one of God's children, not from what you can achieve. You have worth because of what *God does*, not because of what you do.

It is extremely discouraging to unbelievers as well as believers when there is no unity among believers.

As believers, we are responsible to encourage and help others. Do not allow petty differences to divide your church or community.

When others are driven away from their faith, there is a price to be paid when we face the judgment of God.

In this study you will see many scriptures that show that we must work toward unity with love.

Chapter 1



Barriers to unity

Genesis 13:7-8

So an argument broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.

Then Abram talked it over with Lot. "This arguing between our herdsmen has got to stop," he said. "After all, we are close relatives!"

Surrounded by hostile neighbors, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot should have pulled together. Instead, they let petty jealousy tear them apart. Similar situations exist today. Christians often bicker while Satan is at work all around them.

Rivalries, arguments, and disagreements among believers can be destructive in three ways.

- (1) They damage goodwill, trust, and peace—the foundations of good human relations.
- (2) They hamper progress toward important goals.

(3) They make us self-centered rather than love-centered.

Jesus understood how destructive arguments among brothers could be. In his final prayer before being betrayed and arrested, Jesus asked God that his followers be “one” (John 17:21).

Achieving unity amidst conflict

1 Samuel 3:1

Meanwhile, the boy Samuel was serving the Lord by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the Lord were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.

Although God had spoken directly and audibly with Moses and Joshua, his word became rare during the three centuries of rule by judges.

By Eli’s time, no prophets were speaking God’s messages to Israel. Why? Look at the attitude of Eli’s sons. They either refused to listen to God or allowed greed to get in the way of any communication with him.

Listening and responding is vital in a relationship with God. Although God does not always use the sound of a human voice, he always speaks clearly through his Word.

To receive his messages, we must be ready to listen and to act upon what he tells us. Like Samuel, be ready to say, “Here I am” when God calls you to action.

Unity comes through organization

1 Kings 12:1

Rehoboam went to Shechem, where all Israel had gathered to make him king.

Solomon was well organized, with 11 chief officials with specific responsibilities, 12 district governors, and a manager in charge of the district officers.

Each person had a specific responsibility or territory to manage. This organization was essential to maintain the government's effectiveness: it was a wise move by a wise man.

It is good stewardship to be well organized. Good organization helps people work together in harmony and ensures that the desired goal will be reached.

Unity cannot be obtained by force.

2 Chron. 11:1-18

When Rehoboam arrived at Jerusalem, he mobilized the armies of Judah and Benjamin—180,000 select troops—to fight against the army of Israel and to restore the kingdom to him.

But the Lord said to Shemaiah, the man of God, "Say to Rehoboam son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all the Israelites in Judah and Benjamin:

'This is what the Lord says: Do not fight against your relatives. Go back home, for what has happened is my doing!' “So they obeyed the message of the Lord and did not fight against Jeroboam.

But all the priests and Levites living among the northern tribes of Israel sided with Rehoboam. The Levites even abandoned their homes and property and moved to Judah and Jerusalem, because Jeroboam and his sons would not allow them to serve the Lord as priests.

Jeroboam appointed his own priests to serve at the pagan shrines, where they worshiped the goat and calf idols he had made.

Unity comes from looking out for one another.

Neh. 4:16

But from then on, only half my men worked while the other half stood guard with spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. The officers stationed themselves behind the people of Judah

The workers were spread out along the wall, so Nehemiah devised a plan of defense that would unite and protect his people—half the men worked while the other half stood guard.

Christians need to help one another in the same way because we can become so afraid of possible dangers that we can't get anything done. By looking out for each other, we will be free to put forth our best efforts, confident that others are ready to offer help when needed. Don't

cut yourself off from others; instead, join together for mutual benefit. You need them as much as they need you.

The importance of unity

Psalm 133:1-3

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious ointment upon the head that ran down upon the beard even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

David stated that unity is pleasant and precious.

Unfortunately, unity does not abound in the church as it should. People disagree and cause division over unimportant issues. Some delight in causing tension by discrediting others.

Unity is important because

- (1) it makes the church a positive example to the world and helps draw others to us;

- (2) it helps us cooperate as a body of believers as God meant us to, giving us a foretaste of heaven;
- (3) it renews and revitalizes ministry because there is less tension to sap our energy.

Living in unity does not mean that we will agree on everything; there will be many opinions just as there are many notes in a musical chord. But we must agree on our purpose in life—to work together for God. Our outward expression of unity will reflect our inward unity of purpose.

Expensive oil was used by Moses to anoint Aaron as the first high priest of Israel (Exodus 29:7) and to dedicate all the priests to God's service. Brotherly unity, like the anointing oil, shows that we are dedicated to serving God wholeheartedly.

Acts 2:40-43

And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, save yourselves from this untoward generation.

Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there was added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

And fear came upon every soul: and the apostles did many wonders and signs.

About 3,000 people became new believers when Peter preached the Good News about Christ. These new Christians were united with the

other believers, taught by the apostles, and included in the prayer meetings and fellowship.

New believers in Christ need to be in groups where they can learn God's Word, pray, and mature in the faith. If you have just begun a relationship with Christ, seek out other believers for fellowship, prayer, and teaching. This is the way to grow.

“Breaking of bread” refers to communion services that were celebrated in remembrance of Jesus and were patterned after the Last Supper that Jesus had with his disciples before his death (Matthew 26:26-29).

Our common faith should unify us.

Mark 9:40

Anyone who is not against us is for us.

Jesus was not saying that being indifferent or neutral toward him is as good as being committed. As he explained in Matthew 12:30, “He who is not with me is against me.” In both cases, Jesus was pointing out that neutrality toward him is not possible.

Nevertheless, his followers will not all resemble each other or belong to the same groups. People who are on Jesus' side have the same goal of building up the kingdom of God, and they should not let their differences interfere with this goal.

Those who share a common faith in Christ should cooperate. People don't have to be just like us to be following Jesus with us.

How we are united with Christ.

John 6:51

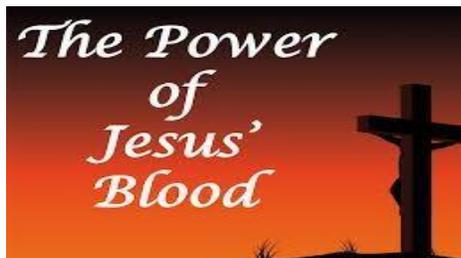
I am the living bread that came down out of heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; this bread is my flesh, offered so the world may live."

How can Jesus give us his flesh as bread to eat?

To eat living bread means to accept Christ into our lives and become united with him. We are united with Christ in two ways:

- (1) By believing in his death (the sacrifice of his flesh) and resurrection and
- (2) By devoting ourselves to living as he requires, depending on his teaching for guidance and trusting in the Holy Spirit for power.

Chapter 2



Jesus stressed unity among believers.

John 17:21-23

My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.

"I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are— I in them and you in me, all being perfected into one. Then the world will know that you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me.

Jesus' great desire for his disciples was that they would become one. He wanted them unified as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love. Are you helping to unify the body of Christ, the church? You can pray for other Christians, avoid gossip, build others up, work together in humility, give your time and money, exalt Christ, and refuse to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Jesus prayed for unity among the believers based on the believers' unity with him and the Father. Christians can know unity among themselves if

they are living in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the vine is united with all other branches doing the same.

Holy Spirit unites Christian community.

Acts 1:5

John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

At Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was made available to all who believed in Jesus.

We receive the Holy Spirit (are baptized with him) when we receive Jesus Christ. The baptism of the Holy Spirit must be understood in the light of his total work in Christians.

- (1) The Spirit marks the beginning of the Christian experience.

We cannot belong to Christ without his Spirit (Romans 8:9); we cannot be united to Christ without his Spirit (1 Cor. 6:17); we cannot be adopted as his children without his Spirit (Romans 8:14-17; Galatians 4:6-7); we cannot be in the body of Christ except by baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13).

- (2) The Spirit is the power of our new lives. He begins a lifelong process of change as we become more like Christ (Galatians 3:3; Phil. 1:6). When we receive Christ by faith, we begin an immediate personal relationship with God. The Holy Spirit works in us to help us become like Christ.

- (3) The Spirit unites the Christian community in Christ (Ephes. 2:19-22). All can experience the Holy Spirit, and he works through all (1 Cor. 12:11; Ephes. 4:4).

Differences of opinion need not affect unity.

Acts 4:32

All the believers were of one heart and mind, and they felt that what they owned was not their own; they shared everything they had.

Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful, if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential—loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word.

Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity.

None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, and so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty.

How do you feel about your possessions? We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, and we are only sharing what is already his.

The early church was able to share possessions and property as a result of the unity brought by the Holy Spirit working in and through the believers' lives.

This way of living is different from communism because:

- (1) The sharing was voluntary;
- (2) It didn't involve *all* private property, but only as much as was needed;
- (3) it was not a membership requirement in order to be a part of the church. The spiritual unity and generosity of these early believers attracted others to them.

This organizational structure is not a Biblical command, but it offers vital principles for us to follow.

1 Cor. 1:10-11

Now, dear brothers and sisters, I appeal to you by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to stop arguing among yourselves. Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church.

I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose. For some members of Chloe's household have told me about your arguments, dear brothers and sisters.

Paul founded the church in Corinth on his second missionary journey. Eighteen months after he left, arguments and divisions arose, and some church members slipped back into an immoral life-style.

Paul wrote this letter to address the problems, to clear up confusion about right and wrong, and to remove the immorality among them.

The Corinthian people had a reputation for jumping from fad to fad; Paul wanted to keep Christianity from degenerating into just another fad.

By saying “brothers,” Paul is emphasizing that all Christians are part of God’s family. Believers share a unity that runs even deeper than that of blood brothers and sisters.

To “agree with one another,” allow for “no divisions” and “be perfectly united in mind and thought” does not require everyone to believe exactly the same.

There is a difference between having opposing viewpoints and being divisive. A group of people will not completely agree on every issue, but they can work together harmoniously if they agree on what truly matters—Jesus Christ is Lord of all.

In your church, speak and behave in a way that will reduce arguments and increase harmony. Petty differences should never divide Christians.

Unity is a priority for the church.

1 Cor. 12:13

Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But one Spirit has baptized us all into Christ’s body, and we have all received the same Spirit.

The church is composed of many types of people from a variety of backgrounds with a multitude of gifts and abilities. It is easy for these differences to divide people, as was the case in Corinth.

But despite the differences, all believers have one thing in common—faith in Christ. On this essential truth the church finds unity. One Holy Spirit into one body of believers, the church, baptizes all believers. We don't lose our individual identities, but we have an overriding oneness in Christ.

When a person becomes a Christian, the Holy Spirit takes up residence, and he or she is born into God's family. "We were all given the one Spirit to drink" means that the same Holy Spirit completely fills our innermost beings. As members of God's family, we may have different interests and gifts, but we have a common goal.

Chapter 3



Seeking unity in marriage

1 Cor. 7:16-17

You wives must remember that your husbands might be converted because of you. And you husbands must remember that your wives might be converted because of you.

You must accept whatever situation the Lord has put you in, and continue on as you were when God first called you. This is my rule for all the churches.

Some used loopholes to get out of marriage misuses this verse. But Paul's statements were given to encourage the Christian spouse to try to get along with the unbeliever and make the marriage work. If, however, the unbelieving spouse insisted on leaving, Paul said to let him or her go. The only alternative would be for the Christian to deny his or her faith to preserve the marriage, and that would be worse than dissolving the marriage. Paul's chief purpose in writing this was to urge the married couples to seek unity, not separation (see 1 Cor. 7:17; 1 Peter 3:1-2).

Apparently the Corinthian were ready to make wholesale changes without thinking through the ramifications. Paul was writing to say that people should be Christians where they are.

You can do God's work and demonstrate your faith *anywhere*. If you became a Christian after marriage, and your spouse is not a believer, remember that you don't have to be married to a Christian to live for Christ. Don't assume that you are in the wrong place, or stuck with the wrong person. You may be just where God wants you (see 1 Cor. 7:20).

Lack of unity comes from lack of love.

Galatians 5:14-15

For the whole law can be summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

But if instead of showing love among yourselves you are always biting and devouring one another, watch out! Beware of destroying one another.

When we are not motivated by love, we become critical of others. We stop looking for good in them and see only their faults. Soon the unity of believers is broken. Have you talked behind someone's back? Have you focused on others' shortcomings instead of their strengths? Remind yourself of Jesus' command to love others as you love yourself (Matthew 22:39).

When you begin to feel critical of someone, make a list of that person's positive qualities. If there are problems that need to be addressed, it is better to confront in love than to gossip.

You must work at unity

Ephes. 4:1-6

Therefore I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling, for God has called you. Be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Always keep yourselves united in the Holy Spirit, and bind yourselves together with peace.

We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all.

“There is one body,” says Paul. Unity does not just happen; we have to work at it. Often differences among people can lead to division, but this should not be true in the church.

Instead of concentrating on what divides us, we should remember what unites us: *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* hope, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God!

Have you learned to appreciate people who are different from you? Can you see how their differing gifts and viewpoints can help the church as it does God's work? Learn to enjoy the way we members of Christ's body complement one another

Why lying is dangerous to unity

Ephes. 4:25

So put away all falsehood and "tell your neighbor the truth" because we belong to each other.

Lying to each other disrupts unity by creating conflicts and destroying trust. It tears down relationships and leads to open warfare in a church.

Achieving unity in marriage

Ephes. 5:22-24

You wives will submit to your husbands as you do to the Lord. For a husband is the head of his wife as Christ is the head of his body, the church; he gave his life to be her Savior.

As the church submits to Christ, so you wives must submit to your husbands in everything.

Although some people have distorted Paul's teaching on submission by giving unlimited authority to husbands, we cannot get around it—Paul told wives to submit to their husbands.

The fact that a teaching is not popular is no reason to discard it. According to the Bible, the man is the spiritual head of the family, and his wife should acknowledge his leadership.

But real spiritual leadership involves service. Just as Christ served the disciples, even to the point of washing their feet, so the husband is to serve his wife.

A wise and Christ-honoring husband will not take advantage of his leadership role, and a wise and Christ-honoring wife will not try to undermine her husband's leadership. Love is the greatest unifying force

Chapter 4



Sharing God's Blessings

Philip. 1:7-8

It is right that I should feel as I do about all of you, for you have a very special place in my heart. We have shared together the blessings of God, both when I was in prison and when I was out, defending the truth and telling others the Good News.

God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus.

Have you ever longed to see a friend with whom you share fond memories? Paul had such a longing to see the Christians at Philippi. His

love and affection for them was based not merely on past experiences, but also on the unity that comes when believers draw upon Christ's love.

All Christians are part of God's family and thus share equally in the transforming power of his love. Do you feel a deep love for fellow Christians, friends and strangers alike? Let Christ's love motivate you to love other Christians and to express that love in your actions toward them.

1 John 2:7-8

Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment, for it is an old one you have always had, right from the beginning. This commandment—to love one another—is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new.

This commandment is true in Christ and is true among you, because the darkness is disappearing and the true light is already shining.

The commandment to love others is both old and new. It is old because it comes from the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18).

It is new because Jesus interpreted it in a radically new way (John 13:34-35). In the Christian church, love is not only expressed by showing respect; it is also expressed through self-sacrifice and servanthood (John 15:13).

In fact, it can be defined as "selfless giving," reaching beyond friends to enemies and persecutors (Matthew 5:43-48).

Love should be the unifying force and the identifying mark of the Christian community.

Love is the key to walking in the light, because we cannot grow spiritually while we hate others.

Our growing relationship with God will result in growing relationships with others.

Unity among Believers

Philippians 2:2

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose

Many people—even Christians—live only to make a good impression on others or to please themselves. But “selfish ambition or vain conceit” brings discord.

Paul therefore stressed spiritual unity, asking the Philippians to love one another and to be one in spirit and purpose. When we work together, caring for the problems of others as if they were our problems, we demonstrate Christ’s example of putting others first, and we experience unity.

Don’t be so concerned about making a good impression or meeting your own needs that you strain relationships in God’s family.

Romans 12:16

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Pursue peace in unity

Romans 14:19

So then we pursue the things that make for peace and the building up of one another.

Sin is not just a private matter. Everything we do affects others, and we have to think of them constantly. God created us to be interdependent, not independent. We who are strong in our faith must, without pride or condescension, treat others with love, patience, and self-restraint.

Acts 4:32

And the congregation of those who believed was of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.

Differences of opinion are inevitable among human personalities and can actually be helpful, if handled well. But spiritual unity is essential—loyalty, commitment, and love for God and his Word.

Without spiritual unity, the church could not survive. Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians to urge the church in Corinth toward greater unity.

None of these Christians felt that what they had was their own, and so they were able to give and share, eliminating poverty among them. They would not let a brother or sister suffer when others had plenty.

How do you feel about your possessions? We should adopt the attitude that everything we have comes from God, and we are only sharing what is already his.

1 Peter 3:8

To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit;

Peter lists five key elements that should characterize any group of believers:

- (1) Harmony—pursuing the same goals;
- (2) Sympathy—being responsive to others' needs;
- (3) Love—seeing and treating each other as brothers and sisters;
- (4) Compassion—being affectionately sensitive and caring; and
- (5) Humility—being willing to encourage one another and rejoice in each other's successes.

These five qualities go a long way toward helping believers serve God effectively.

Philippians 1:27

Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of

you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;

Paul encourages the believers to be unified, as they “stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith.” How sad that much time and effort is lost in some churches by fighting against one another instead of uniting against the real opposition! It takes a courageous church to resist in fighting and to maintain the common purpose of serving Christ.

Ephesians 4:3

Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To build unity is one of the Holy Spirit’s important roles. He leads, but we have to be willing to be led and to do our part to keep the peace.

We do that by focusing on God, not on ourselves.

Chapter 5



God's goal of unity

Deuteronomy 6:4

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

Monotheism—belief in only one God—was a distinctive feature of Hebrew religion. Many ancient religions believed in many gods. But the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the God of the whole earth, the only true God.

This was an important insight for the nation of Israel because they were about to enter a land filled with people who believed in many gods.

Both then and today, there are people who prefer to place their trust in many different “gods.” But the day is coming when God will be recognized as the only one. He will be the king over the whole earth (Zech. 14:9).

John 17:22

"The glory which you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as we are one;

Jesus' great desire for his disciples was that they would become one. He wanted them unified as a powerful witness to the reality of God's love. Are you helping to unify the body of Christ, the church?

You can pray for other Christians, avoid gossip, build others up, work together in humility, give your time and money, exalt Christ, and refuse to get sidetracked arguing over divisive matters.

Jesus prayed for unity among the believers based on the believers' unity with him and the Father. Christians can know unity among themselves if they are living in union with God. For example, each branch living in union with the vine is united with all other branches doing the same.

John 1:1

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In this Gospel, John provides clear evidence that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing in him we may have eternal life. John also provides unique material about Jesus' birth. He did not come into being when he was born, because he is eternal.

What Jesus taught and what he did are tied inseparably to who he is. John shows Jesus as fully human and fully God.

Although Jesus took upon himself full humanity and lived as a man, he never ceased to be the eternal God who has always existed, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, and the source of eternal life.

This is the truth about Jesus, and the foundation of all truth. If we cannot or do not believe this basic truth, we will not have enough faith to trust our eternal destiny to him.

That is why John wrote this Gospel—to build faith and confidence in Jesus Christ so that we may believe that he truly was and is the Son of God (John 20:30-31).

John wrote to believers everywhere, both Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles). As one of Jesus' 12 disciples, John was an eyewitness, so his story is accurate. His book is not a biography (like the book of Luke); it is a thematic presentation of Jesus' life.

Many in John's original audience had a Greek background. Greek culture encouraged worship of many mythological gods, whose supernatural characteristics were as important to Greeks as genealogies were to Jews.

John shows that Jesus is not only different from but superior to these gods of mythology.

What does John mean by *the Word*? *The Word* was a term used by theologians and philosophers, both Jews and Greeks, in many different ways.

In Hebrew Scripture, *the Word* was an agent of creation (Psalm 33:6), the source of God's message to his people through the prophets (Hosea 1:2), and God's law, his standard of holiness (Psalm 119:11).

In Greek philosophy, *the Word* was the principle of reason that governed the world, or the thought still in the mind, while in Hebrew thought, *the Word* was another expression for God.

John 17:11

"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are one.

Jesus was asking that the disciples be united in harmony and love as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are united—the strongest of all unions. (See the note on +John 17:21-23.)

Galatians 3:20

Now a mediator is not for one party only; whereas God is only one.

When God gave his promise to Abraham, he did it by himself alone, without angels or Moses as mediators. Although it is not mentioned in Exodus, Jews believed that the Ten Commandments had been given to Moses by angels (Stephen referred to this in his speech, see Acts 7:38, 53).

Paul was showing the superiority of salvation and growth by faith over trying to be saved by keeping the Jewish laws. Christ is the best and only way given by God for us to come to him (1 Tim. 2:5).

Sin offends our holy God and separates us from him. Because God is holy, he cannot ignore, excuse, or tolerate sin as though it didn't matter. Sin cuts people off from him, forming a wall to isolate God from the people he loves. No wonder this long list of wretched sins makes God angry and forces him to look the other way.

People who die with their life of sin unforgiven separate themselves eternally from God. God wants them to live with him forever, but he cannot take them into his holy presence unless their sin is removed. Have you confessed your sin to God, allowing him to remove it? The Lord can save you if you turn to him.

Psalms 133:1

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!

Chapter 6



Unity of God's people

Malachi 2:10

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?"

The people were being unfaithful. Though not openly saying they rejected God, they were living as if he did not exist.

Men were marrying pagan women who worshiped idols. Divorce was common, occurring for no reason other than a desire for change.

People acted as if they could do anything without being punished. And they wondered why God refused to accept their offerings and bless them (Malachi 2:13)!

We cannot successfully separate our dealings with God from the rest of our lives. He must be Lord of all.

Matthew 23:8-9

"But do not be called Rabbi; for one is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. "Do not call anyone on earth your father; for one is your Father, He who is in heaven.

Romans 8:15-17

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

There is a price for being identified with Jesus. Along with the great treasures, Paul mentions the suffering that Christians must face. What kinds of suffering are we to endure? For first-century believers, there was economic and social persecution, and some even faced death.

We too must pay a price for following Jesus. In many parts of today's world, Christians face pressures just as severe as those faced by Christ's first followers.

Even in countries where Christianity is tolerated or encouraged, Christians must not become complacent. To live as Jesus did—serving others, giving up one's own rights, resisting pressures to conform to the world—always exacts a price.

Nothing we suffer, however, can compare to the great price that Jesus paid to save us.

Colossians 1:2

**To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father.**

The city of Colosse was 100 miles east of Ephesus on the Lycus River. It was not as influential as the nearby city of Laodicea, but as a trading center it was a crossroads for ideas and religions. Colosse had a large Jewish population—many Jews had fled there when they were forced out of Jerusalem under the persecutions of Antiochus III and IV, almost 200 years before Christ. The church in Colosse had been founded by Epaphras (Col. 1:7), one of Paul's converts. Paul had not yet visited this church. His purpose in writing was to refute heretical teachings about Christ that had been causing confusion among the Christians there.

1 John 5:1

**Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and
whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.**

When we become Christians, we become part of God's family, with fellow believers as our brothers and sisters. It is God who determines who the other family members are, not us. We are simply called to accept and love them. How well do you treat your fellow family members?

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, and his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

"Once you were not a people; now you are the people of God. Once you received none of God's mercy; now you have received his mercy."

Christians sometimes speak of “the priesthood of all believers.” In Old Testament times, people did not approach God directly.

A priest acted as intermediary between God and sinful human beings. With Christ’s victory on the cross, that pattern changed.

Now we can come directly into God’s presence without fear (Hebrews 4:16), and we are given the responsibility of bringing others to him also (2 Cor. 5:18-21).

When we are united with Christ as members of his body, we join in his priestly work of reconciling God and man.

People often base their self-concept on their accomplishments. But our relationship with Christ is far more important than our jobs, successes, wealth, or knowledge.

God has chosen us as his very own, and we have been called to represent him to others. Remember that your value comes from being one of God’s children, not from what you can achieve. You have worth because of what *God does*, not because of what you do.

Deuteronomy 7:6

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

How did Israel deserve to be chosen above all of the other nations at that time? It was not a matter of Israel's merit, but of God keeping his promise to their ancestors. Just as God chose the nation of Israel, he has chosen all believers today to be a part of his treasured possession. Similarly, it is not because of our merit that we have come to faith in Christ. Instead God chose us out of his goodness and grace.

References:

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Additional comments and charts are taken from:

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