

Keys to Unity

Psalm 133:1 -A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. A psalm of David. How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!

How wonderful when the Church lives in unity! The Apostle Paul wrote to the Philippians that they would make his “joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose” (Phil. 2:2). But, what unlocks the door to unity in the Church? *Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. (Phil. 2:1-2, NASB)*

The “if” in verse one leads to the “then” in verse two. Unity is conditioned upon certain realities. It’s like opening a door with multiple locks. You cannot fully open the door to unity without all the right keys.

4 Keys to Church Unity Based on Philippians 2:1-2



1) Function from your position “in Christ.”

“if there is any encouragement in Christ”

According to Ephesians 2:6, God has “seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” When we look at life from that position, we see things differently than when we are right in the fray of it all. We see the big picture, not merely the piece that affects me.

And, we no longer see a Church with all of its flaws but rather how God sees her “in Christ” — dearly loved, His precious Bride. Then we can be encouraged despite its blemishes. We can come alongside (paraklesis) of others because we see them, and ourselves, as we are in Christ.



2) Know and rely on God's love.

"if there is any consolation of love"

We need unconditional love if we are going to remain united through the failings of one another and strong differences of opinions. We need a love that perseveres, that will not fail ... the love described in 1 Corinthians 13, agape — God's love. Human love, that which we can muster up within ourselves, will be insufficient. Only God's love will enable us to break through the walls and address the feelings of one another without attacking the person.



3) Walk together in the Spirit.

"if there is any fellowship of the Spirit"

"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (James 4:1) The solution? — "walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16) When we are more concerned about not grieving or quenching the Spirit among us than getting our way, we come together for the good of the whole. It's not just about me!



4) Guard your heart.

"if any affection and compassion"

The original Greek words for affection (splanchnon) and compassion (oiktirmos) both relate to our inwards parts (bowels, heart, etc.). These two words seem to be interchanged in their various uses, both signifying the seat of our strong emotions — what we metaphorically call our heart. We are to respond to one another from the core of our being. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 6:45 — "A good man brings good

things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” Is it little wonder we are commanded to “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it” (Prov. 4:23)? These four keys enable us to demonstrate the Christ-like selflessness and humility needed to experience unity.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. (Phil. 2:3-8)

Sometimes we have to face the reality of a sickness before we are willing to seek treatment. Please read the next sentence carefully. One of the greatest sicknesses in our churches in America is disunity. Indeed, many of the problems we think we have are really just symptoms of the breakdown of unity in the church.

The early church in Jerusalem thrived because it was so unified. Acts 2:47 says: “(They were) praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (HCSB). The phrase “having favor with all the people” refers to those on the outside looking at the

church on the inside. They saw a selfless and unified church, and were thus attracted to it.

So what are some of the key reasons we are seeing the breakdown of unity in our churches? Though my list is not exhaustive, allow me to share fourteen of those reasons.

- 1 Gossip.** Church members talk about one another instead of talking to one another. Paul calls church members who gossip people “filled with all unrighteousness” (Romans 1:29, HCSB).
- 2 Actions cloaked in darkness.** I recently heard of a church personnel committee and a few church staff members who worked in darkness to fire a pastor without ever meeting with him first or giving him reasons for his dismissal. Then they refused to respond to church members who were asking questions.
- 3 Failure to confront church bullies.** Some church members seek power in a church they can't get elsewhere. They are devious and dangerous. They must be courageously confronted.
- 4 Self-serving church members.** Some church members insist on getting their way for everything from worship style to the order of the worship service. Biblical church membership,

however, is selfless and more concerned about others.

- 5 Lack of prayer.** A church that does not pray together is likely to fragment into special interest groups.
- 6 Fear of confrontation.** Too many church members would rather sweep problems under the rug than deal with them. I know of one church where two deacons were known to be having affairs. No one wanted to deal with it.
- 7 Adopting the hypercritical spirit of culture.** This reality is especially true in blogs and social media. I've seen many pastors attacked publicly on Twitter and Facebook.
- 8 Low expectations.** Many churches have no clear guidelines on what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. If you expect little from members, that's exactly what you'll get. And some of them will use their idle time to gossip, criticize, and tear down.
- 9 No church discipline.** The majority of churches with which I have familiarity have no process for church discipline, or they have a process in place in theory only.
- 10 Churches known more for what they are against rather than what they are for.** This

negativity becomes pervasive in the congregation and destroys church unity.

11 Fear of losing members. I am familiar with one church plagued by a spirit of divisiveness by one particular member. No members have confronted him because they don't want to lose one of the biggest givers in the church.

12 Failure to be evangelistic. I have never known a church member who is both evangelistic and divisive.

13 Power groups. Sometimes the bullies in the church get allies to form power groups. They may be informal groups, or they can be formal groups like elders, deacons, staff, or personnel committees.

14 The silent and fearful majority. One church member said it is not always good to know the truth. Such a statement is unbiblical and symptomatic of members who let evil exist because they are afraid to confront it.

One of the greatest problems in our churches is the breakdown of church unity. It is insidious, debilitating, and destructive.

Paul urged us "to walk worthy of the calling you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, accepting one another in love, diligently

keep the unity of the Spirit with the peace that binds us” (Ephesians 4: 1-3, HCSB).

Jesus said in John 13:35: “By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The breakdown of church unity is one of the most critical problems in our churches today. Are you part of the solution?

Church unity, frankly, is lacking in too many of our churches today. Church splits, fights, and bickering are far too common. So today on the podcast, we look at eight simple steps that can help preserve church unity. These aren't an overnight fix, but they can set your church on a trajectory to promoting unity in the fellowship.

Some highlights from today's episode include:

- One of the major concerns in the church today is church unity.
- Corporate worship gatherings in the church should be focused on prayer and the ministry of the Word.
- A denomination will not be unified as long as the churches within it are not unified themselves.
- Where two or more Baptists are gathered, there are three or more opinions.

- Most disagreements in the church happen over the **way** things are done, not **why** they are done.
- When you start comparing your church to others, you tear down the unity in your church.
- The more you focus on prayer and Scripture, the more you'll bring the church together in unity.
- The more the Body of Christ comes together in selflessness, the more unified a church will become.

The eight steps to church unity we cover in this podcast are:

- 1 Make prayer and Scripture the focus of corporate gatherings**
- 2 Preach and teach about church unity**
- 3 Put others before yourself**
- 4 Talk to people, not about people**
- 5 Be a part of the change you want to see**
- 6 Stand up for the leadership of the church**
- 7 Be willing to not get your way if it means advancing the mission**
- 8 Don't compare your church to the one down the street or across town**

6 Commitments for Growing a Church with Unity

By [Pastor Rick Warren](#)

One of the reasons why Saddleback church has grown over the years is because we have maintained a harmonious atmosphere. When there is a church that is loving, it attracts people like a magnet. When a church really loves, really offers love to each other and those who are welcomed into it, you'd have to lock the doors to keep people out. Because Saddleback is a loving church, we continue to reach out and we continue to grow.

Growth is automatic. All living things grow and if a church is alive and living, it will grow naturally. The question, if a church isn't growing, is, "What is keeping it from growing?" If you remove the barriers to growth in your ministry or in the church as a whole, it will automatically grow.

A simple reading of Romans 14 reveals six ways that we are to build each other up rather than tearing each other down.

1. The first commitment to make to grow a more harmonious church is **committing ourselves to building each other up**. What kind of difference would it make if all of your church's staff and key leaders began to write one note per week to someone else in the church's leadership encouraging them? Life's tough and there's enough discouraging people in the world that what we need is a whole band, an army, of encouragers.

2. The second commitment for growing a more loving church is **recognizing the value of every person**. Every church is made up of a broad range of personalities. Inevitably, people will sometimes view others as obnoxious or immature. But the value of a loving church is that while you may disagree with others, you never forget that Christ died for them. That shows how valuable they are. That shows how important they are. What right do I have to hurt people for whom Christ died? The answer is, I don't have the right. Teach and model the belief that everybody is important to God.

3. The third commitment for growing a more unified church is **keeping our focus on what's really important**. Having been the

son of a pastor and having been in literally hundreds of churches, I have discovered that churches don't split over major issues. They split over trivial things. Most people who leave the church leave because of a minor issue. They don't leave because of a doctrinal issue, but wise church leaders emphasize what is eternal, not external. Focus on what's really important.

4. The fourth commitment for growing a more unified church is **limiting our liberty out of love for each other**. When my liberty limits the work of God, then we've got a problem. As a Christian leader in our church, you need to be aware that there are some things other people in the church could probably get away with but you can't because you're a leader and they're watching you. You need to be aware of that. That's the price of leadership.

5. The fifth commitment for growing a more loving church is **not forcing my opinion on others**. On disputable matters, keep them between you and the Lord. I can practice my freedom without parading it. Some legalists are going to be upset no matter what you do. Romans 12:18 says "As far as it depends on you, if it is possible, live at peace with all men." God says that there are some people you can't get along with. Jesus frequently did things that the Pharisees disapproved of. They were hard core legalists. He went ahead and did them anyway because it wasn't an issue of being a stumbling block, but rather an issue of having people who were simply impossible to please.

6. One last commitment for growing a more harmonious church is **living by faith**. "The man who has doubts is condemned if he eats." People need to be convinced in their own minds. What you need to do, if you're going to mature as a believer, is develop some biblical convictions and be lovingly honest about them. If you're a Christian, part of your job description is to build up other Christians. If you're not doing that, you're not fulfilling part of your job description. It is our responsibility. Jesus didn't please Himself. If you

want to be like Christ, then you need to put the needs of others ahead of your own and be a servant.

How did Christ accept us? Unconditionally. Non-judgmentally. To accept each other as Christ accepted us means to accept them in the way that Christ accepts you, which is never based on performance.

4 Keys to Congregational Unity

It's been a while since we looked at the Jerusalem church. I want to get back to their success. Their first key was being devoted to God. Now we are examining their unity. **Acts 4:32** ^L says the congregation was of one heart and one soul. We have also examined why unity is so important based on **Philippians 1:29-30** ^L. Today, we continue our look by examining how we can have this unity in a congregation. **Philippians 1:27-2:11** ^L provides 4 Keys to Congregational Unity.

4 Keys to Congregational Unity


1. Members must personally conduct themselves in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel (**Philippians 1:27** ^L).

*This is really a no-brainer. If we are all walking hand in hand with Christ, then we will all walk hand in hand with one another. But notice the responsibility here. I need to work on me. Instead of spending my time trying to get you to walk in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel, I need to work on my walk. Looking at **Ephesians 4:1-3** ^L can help me with my walk.*

2. We must stand firm and strive together with one mind against the proper opponents (**Philippians 1:27-28** ^L).



Too many churches have disunity because the members are striving with one another. Sadly, we can find innumerable things to argue about if we don't try too hard not to. Perhaps because we aren't in the midst of persecution it is hard for us to recognize who the proper opponents are. But it is not one another.



However, there is another part of this. Not only must we not strive with one another, we must learn to stand firm and strive against the real opponents. Too many churches don't want to stand for anything. It is modern and hip to act like nothing matters these days. "We accept everything and everybody" can be seen on church signs and billboards across the land. But that won't produce a real unity in a church. That will only produce a social club sweeping everything under the rug. We need to stand for what God stands for or we'll fall with the devil.

3. We must be of the same mind, love, spirit, and purpose (**Philippians 2:2, NASB** )

Paul highlights four issues that help with unity in this simple statement. There is some overlap, but it is good to see each issue of unity.

Same mind—"Mind the same things" (KJV). That is have the same standard—God's word.

*Same love—We must all have the same standard of love—God's love (**I John 4:11** ). Further, we must love all with that same standard (**James 2:1ff** ).*

*Same spirit—We must be of one accord (KJV). That is, as all the different members of a body are directed by the same spirit to accomplish the same action, we as different members of the body are working together to accomplish the same actions (cf. **I Corinthians 12:12** ; **Ephesians 4:15-16** ).*

Same purpose: We must be going the same place, accomplishing the same goals.

4. We must put others first (**Philippians 2:3-11** ).

Now we get to the hard stuff. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Quit trying to put self forward. Instead, put others forward. Let them have the honor. Let them be important. Don't merely look out for your own interests, but primarily look out for the interests of others. Let them have the preeminence. Isn't that

*exactly what the Jerusalem disciples were doing when Luke recorded their unity of heart and soul in **Acts 4:32**? They were selling their own possessions so their needy brethren could be cared for. That is putting others first.*

Churches need unity. But unity takes work. Unity takes work from me. I need to quit waiting around for someone else to develop the unity in my congregation. I need to work on me so we can have unity. How about you? Do you need to do any work?
