

Unity in the Family Builds Unity in the Church



By Kim Butts

When Jesus prayed for us in John 17, His primary desire was that we would all be one: *“I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your name – the name You gave Me – so that they may be one as We are one”* (John 17:11).

Christians have failed to be obedient in keeping the unity for which Jesus prayed. The tragedy in this failure is that God’s purposes are evangelistic – that the whole world would know Him through the unity of His followers: *“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: I in them and You in Me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have*

loved them even as You have loved Me” (John 17:20-23).

Our unity is a key to convincing those outside of Christ that He lives. Jesus’ prayer should serve as a convicting rebuke to us, His followers, because of the bitter and senseless divisions we allow within our churches, and within even our own families. He has set the standard for unity – the unity between the Father and the Son. Because the Father and Son are one, we are now one with Jesus. And because we are one with Him, we have everything we need to demonstrate Him to others. *“I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them” (John 17:26).* The active demonstration of a unified body of Christ is a primary way for the world to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Unity Begins with Families

Unity for believers must begin at the level of the family before it can truly characterize the Church. God created families long before He created the Church. He gave many specific instructions to families with the intent of unifying husbands and wives and children into a unit that would honor and reverence Him. His expectations were specific and straightforward whether in the Old Testament or the New: *“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5).* *“[Jesus] answered: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Luke 10:27).*

Can you imagine how quickly God’s kingdom would grow if the Church was comprised of unified families obediently carrying out the Great Commandment and the Great Commission? If each individual family member, and each relationship represented within each family, would determine to live in unity, and if we were all committed to loving the Lord with a desperate passion, and to loving others as Jesus loves us...perhaps then,

a watching world would be drawn to the Father. A family should and must begin with unity –connection, identity, building up of one another, etc. God has given much instruction to parents and to children about their relationships within their families. Only in unity are we able to carry out these relationships successfully, and in ways that are pleasing to the Lord. In order for unbelievers to truly know the love of Christ, they must see it in the unified, loving families that comprise Jesus' Church.

Unity in the Faith

We all have work to do in the kingdom! If we are truly followers of Christ, then we are working to advance His kingdom on earth. *"It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

"Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Ephesians 4:11-16).

Unity in Agreement

"May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6). God has not created us all to think the same or to act the same. He has

uniquely crafted each of us differently in His image. Doesn't that make you amazed at how creative and amazing God Himself must be? The key to having a spirit of unity is not so that we will all think, speak, feel and act the same. It is to have the mind of Christ so that we can lovingly agree to disagree with one another.

My husband and I are involved in two groups of national prayer leaders, many of whom we could never come to agreement with on some matters of doctrine; however, the Father has given us all such a powerful spirit of unity that we all love and respect one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We have, without exception, been able to come into agreement together in prayer. Only a God who has created us for unity, could accomplish such a thing. We could choose to be at odds with one another over our differences. Instead, we have chosen to love one another in the bond of unity created by God Himself.

Unity in Peace

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:1-6). God reconciled us to Himself through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is our responsibility to keep that bond intact through peaceful unity.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the

peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:12-17).

Are the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience woven into the fabric of your family? Are you able to forgive one another as the Lord has forgiven you? Does love characterize who you are? Does the peace of Christ rule in your hearts? Are you thankful? Does the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you express worship to Him with grateful hearts? Do you do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him? Perhaps these are questions that you, as a dearly loved family, should spend some time discussing together. Take each of these questions, examine the roadblocks that keep you from answering “Yes!” wholeheartedly, and decide what changes need to be made so that unity is what others see in your family.

Unity in Love

“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2-3). Is your family encouraged in heart and united in love? Are you an encourager? Do you build up others in your family and love them so that they will have the full riches of complete understanding to know the treasures of wisdom and knowledge through Jesus? What happens in your family when there are disagreements? Do you argue bitterly, or can you set aside your differences long enough to pray together? Perhaps you will come into agreement as the Lord shows you His plan. Or, perhaps, He will give your hearts

a desire to love one another in spite of your differences of opinion. Unity does not mean you always have to agree! What a powerful thing unity is! How much stronger and wiser our families and churches will be when we decide to fulfill the purposes of unity that Jesus has already placed in us.

Walking in Unity as the Family of God

There were times when God placed His hand upon His people to bring them into unity: *"Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the Lord"* (2 Chronicles 30:12). Perhaps a good prayer for His people today would be, "Father, would You place Your hand upon us to give us unity of mind so that we will carry out Your plans and purposes for us? Would You help us to love You with all of our heart, soul and strength? Teach us to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves."

We certainly know that God could place His hand upon His people today and bring us into unity...perhaps He is waiting for us to realize *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity... For there the Lord bestows His blessing..."* (Psalm 133:1, 3b). It is brotherly harmony which sets God's people apart from the world. The Christian life is not yet seen as desirable by a dark world, because we are not yet in harmony with one another! We must be of one mind and heart within our own families and within our churches! The world sees broken marriages and families, damaged relationships, fighting in churches, pastors falling, etc., and cannot be convinced that Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. It is our own sinful behavior that causes many to turn away rather than run towards the Savior.

God's desire is that His people walk in unity, but we are usually more interested in being right than in being one! We have not been faithful to reconcile ourselves one to the other by fervently seeking God in this regard. May we, as families,

and as the Church, repentantly seek to be more interested in being one in Jesus, because that *is* right. *“May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me”* (John 17:23).

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