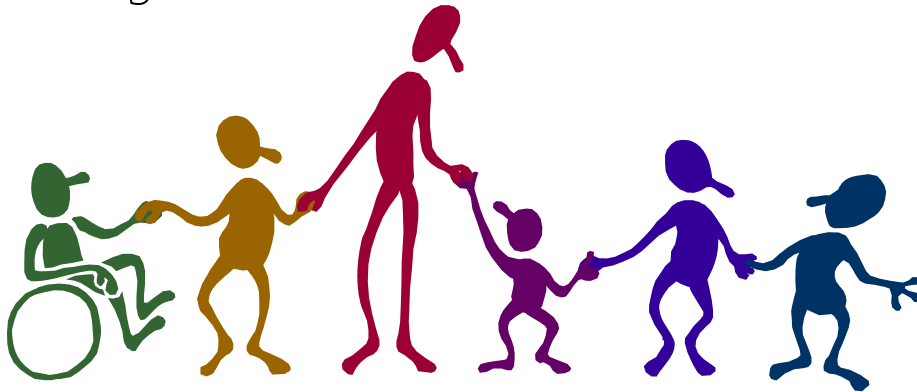


Unity in the church



The importance of unity

Without unity the church is reduced to an uncoordinated, ineffective group of people who fight and quarrel and will eventually self-destruct. This is why Jesus prayed so earnestly that the church may be one.

Just how important is unity or harmony in the local church?

1. Jesus prayer reveals the enormous importance of unity

John 17:20-23 (NLT) **20** I am praying not only for these disciples, but also for all who will ever believe in me because of their testimony. **21** 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. **22** I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are-- **23** 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.

2. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to unify believers.

Eph 4:3-4 (NIV) **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit.

His Spirit leads and guides us making it possible to work together in harmony.

3. Jesus has given us the Word to unite us.

The Word brings the church into one common understanding of His purpose so that they can strive together in unity to accomplish His will. The Word puts everybody on the same page.

Eph 4:5-6 (NLT) **4** We are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. **5** There is only one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** And there is only one God and Father, who is over us all and in us all and living through us all.

Biblical warnings



There are continual warnings given in the Word of God to those that cause strife and division in the church. Harmony in the church is one of the major themes. The New Testament uses many varying words to emphasize the importance of unity in the church.

Here are just a few examples:

James 3: 13-18 (ISV) Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good life that his works are done in humility born of wisdom.

¹⁴ But if you have bitter jealousy and rivalry in your hearts, stop boasting and lying against the truth. ¹⁵ That kind of wisdom doesn't come from above. No, it is worldly, self-centered, and demonic. ¹⁶ For wherever jealousy and rivalry exist, there is disorder and every kind of evil.

¹⁷ However, the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, gentle, willing to yield, full of compassion and good fruits, and without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. ¹⁸ A harvest of righteousness (goodness [NLT]) is grown from the seed of peace planted by peacemakers.

James 4:1-3 (ISV) Where do those fights and quarrels among you come from? They come from your selfish desires that are at war in your bodies, don't they? ² You want something but don't get it, so you commit murder. You covet something but can't obtain it, so you quarrel and fight.

You don't get things because you don't ask for them! ³ You ask for something but don't get it because you ask for it for the wrong reason—for your own pleasure.

Gal 5:13-16 (NIV) You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

15 If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. **16** So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

Gal 5:26 (NIV) Let us not become conceited; provoking and envying each other.

Phil 2:14-15 (NIV) Do everything without complaining or arguing, **15** so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe.

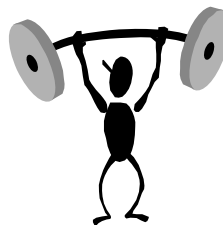
1 Cor 3:3-4 (NIV) You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? ⁴ For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men?

2 Cor 12:20- (NIV) For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.

Other sins that lead to division and strife

- a) Refusal to repent
- b) Refusing to deal with offences
- c) Critical and judgmental attitudes.

We are to love the things that lead to peace and leave all revenge, vengeance and pronouncing judgment to the Lord.



Power of Unity

UNITY EMPOWERS THE CHURCH

The power produced when people live and act in harmony is unimaginable.

Gen 11: (KJV) ⁵ And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built. ⁶ And the LORD said, **Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language;** and this they begin to do: **and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.**

⁷ Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. ⁸ So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to building the city.

The only way the church is going to be one is to have the common language and thinking that the Word of God speaks of. We are admonished to think and speak the same thing and it will be that whatever the church imagines too do for the Lord they will be able to do.

God has made us so that if we work together in unity nothing can stop us from doing the will of God.

1 Cor.1:10 (ASV) ¹⁰ Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

1. Unity provides a powerful and effective witness to the world.

Unity is necessary for church growth. I believe God is reluctant to see people born into a church family that has nothing but strife and division. Unity is where God will command his blessing and when his blessings are manifest it draws people to Christ.

Acts 1:14 (NIV) ¹⁴ “They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”

Acts 2:1 (NKJV) ¹ When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place

Acts 2:2-4 (NKJV) ² And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. ³ Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and *one* sat upon each of them. ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Acts 2:40-41 (NKJV) ⁴⁰ And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, "Be saved from this perverse generation." ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.

Because they were of one heart before the Lord the Holy Spirit was poured out and 3,000 were saved in a day.

John 17:23 AMP “that they may become perfectly united, that the world may know and (definitely recognize) that You sent me.

Phil 1:27-28 (NIV) **27** Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one Spirit, contending (striving together with one mind and spirit) as one man for the faith of the gospel **28** without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved -- and that by God.

2. Unity encourages steadfastness in the faith.

The opposite is true with disunity whether it is in the church or in the secular world. Nothing can prosper in an atmosphere of fighting and quarreling. No political party, no sports team, no business can survive where constant strife and division exists. Whatever a group unites to do or believe they have greater power to achieve there goals.

So if our faith (believing and doing what the Word teaches) is our focal point then unity will empower believers to remain steadfast in that faith.

Phil. 1:27 AMP. "Stand firm in united Spirit and purpose ...contending with a single mind for the faith of the gospel."

Acts 2:46 AMP. "And day after day they regularly assembled in the Temple with a united purpose

Nothing destroys a people working together to accomplish a purpose faster than strife, division and fighting among the people. It promotes discouragement and people want to quit the team, club or organization. This also applies to the church.

3. Unity brings dynamic answers to prayer.

Matt 18:19-20 (Living) **19** "I also tell you this--if two of you agree down here on earth concerning anything you ask for, my Father in heaven will do it for you. **20** For where two or three gather together because they are mine, I will be right there among them."

Matt.18:19 (AMP). "Again I tell you, if two of you on earth agree (harmonise together to make a symphony) about anything and everything, whatsoever you shall ask, it shall come to pass and be done for them by my Father in heaven."

Acts 4:23-24 (ASV) **23** And being let go, they came to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them. **24** And they, when they heard it, lifted up their voice to God with one accord, Verse 31 (ASV) And when they had prayed, the place was shaken wherein they were gathered together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

3. Unity guarantees God's continued blessing.

Psalms 133:1-3 (KJV) ¹ Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! ² *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; ³ 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.

Lev 25:21 (NKJV) ²¹ 'Then I will command My blessing on you in the sixth year, and it will bring forth produce enough for three years.

Acts 4:24 (NLT) **24** Then all the believers were united as they lifted their voices in prayer: "O Sovereign Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- **31** After this prayer, the building where they were meeting shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. And they preached God's message with boldness.

5. Unity brings praise and glory to God.

As it is in the natural so it is in the spiritual. A Father who has children that truly love and appreciate one another will bring honor and praise to the parents so it is with our heavenly Father. Unity is maintained in the spiritual family when we walk humbly, forgive and honor one another.

Romans 15:5-7 (NLT) ⁵ May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other--each with the attitude of Christ Jesus toward the other. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified.

Rom 15:5&6 (AMP)...in mutual harmony... full sympathy... full accord... "that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify God...the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

The Lord expresses his heart in the matter of unity when he says through David his prophet "How good and how pleasant it is".

It is like the sound of a great orchestra in the ears of or God.

Each musician plays in harmony with the others because they are playing music the great composer has written. He knows when they play together it is going to be good and pleasant to his ears.

The audience will stand and applaud as I believe the angels of heaven may do when they see churches working together in harmony.

Spirit Of Unity



The key to unity for the church is the Holy Spirit. God has given us the Holy Spirit so we have the power to do the things that maintain the unity that the Holy Spirit has given.

The scriptures are clear what we need to do to maintain the unity of the Spirit but if we walk in the flesh we will not be able to do it. We are instructed to walk in the spirit and that if we do we will not fulfill the desires of the flesh.

Paul exhorted the church to keep the unity of the Spirit. The fact is we have been given all that we need to be in perfect unity in our churches.

Eph 4:1-6 (NIV) **1** As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. **2** Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. **3** Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. **4** There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism; **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- i) Note: **“I urge you to”** -- this is a very strong word in the Greek. Originally the verb means make haste, and evolved to mean “diligence” and **here it means to give diligence.**
- ii) **“Live worthy of your calling”**, or live and act in a worthy way, a way that honors our heavenly Father. Disunity is not honoring to God.
- iii) **“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit”**, in other words we have a unity that the Spirit has given us and now it is our responsibility to keep it.
- iv) **“In the bond of peace”** Unity results in peaceful relationships in the church. Peace is the glue that will hold the church together through difficulties that it must face. It makes the ship seaworthy, holds it together in the times of storm.

Blessed are the peacemakers

Matt 5:8-9 (RSV) ⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"They shall be called the children of God; ... herein they will resemble him. He is the God of peace; the Son of God is the Prince of peace; the Spirit of adoption is a Spirit of peace. Since God has declared himself reconcilable to us all, he will not own those for his children who are implacable [not capable of being appeased] in their enmity [mutual hatred or ill will] to one another]; **for if the peacemakers are blessed, woe to the peace-breakers!**" —Matthew Henry Unabridged

James 3:17-18 (TLB) ¹⁸ And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

Peace with God, peace from God provides a basis for one to be a promoter of peace. Those who have peace and promote peace God will cause them to make even their enemies to be at peace with them.

Prov.16:7 (NIV) ⁷ When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

"Anything that causes division and strife -- it matters not which church it is in -- is not of the Lord, you may be sure of that. You may boast of your fundamentalism, but if you are causing strife, you are sailing under false colors.—J. Vernon McGee's Thru The Bible

Romans 14:17-19 (KJV) ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 12:18 (NLT) ¹⁸ Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible.

Some times differences will justify people going their separate ways but we can never justify causing division or strife in a church or carrying grudges against those we disagree with.

Paul and Barnabus strongly disagreed whether John Mark should accompany them on an upcoming trip, It resulted in them going separate ways. The reality is those disagreements in judgment and sometimes doctrine happen and the best thing to do is agree to disagree and let each person go on to do the work of the Lord. But let no anger and animosity continue but rather love and respect one another for this is God's commandment.

The mark of a community's (or a churches) true biblical unity--is not the absence of conflict but the presence of a reconciling spirit. - Image: Bill Hybels

Psalms 85:8-13 (NASB) ⁸ I will hear what God the LORD will say; For He will speak peace to His people, to His godly ones; But let them not turn back to folly. ⁹ Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, That glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Loving kindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. ¹¹ Truth springs from the earth, And righteousness looks down from heaven. ¹² Indeed, the LORD will give what is good, And our land will yield its produce. ¹³ Righteousness will go before Him And will make His footsteps into a way.

Maintaining Unity



1. How do we as leaders maintain the unity of the Spirit in our churches?

Eph 4:1-6 (NIV) ¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.** ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

- i) **As leaders we must teach and model humility.** As leaders we have a great opportunity to show our people how to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. We must not “think of ourselves above” what God has given us by His grace. The fact is that one of the great contributors to disunity is pride. “Only by pride comes contention”, Solomon said. Leaders need to always have a reverse gear (HUMILITY) that if you make a mistake you can back up quickly.
- ii) **As leaders we must teach and model gentleness** as opposed to forcefulness. Some think that gentleness is weakness but it is not, it is power under control. The confidence that we are right can lead to a “my way or the highway” mentality. Our forcefulness can tend to inflame grievances. Cool heads lead to resolution rather than explosion.

Prov. 15:1 “a gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” THEY PRODUCE DISHARMONY

iii) As leaders we must teach and model patient endurance.

Being patient means we are willing to endure personal discomfort (with peace) while allowing God to deal with the situation. Impatience can cause one to strike out prematurely and this can increase strife rather than bring about a solution. Impatience often reveals that we care more about our own feelings than the unity of the church. Impatience or endurance often leads to the fight or flight response.

vi) As leaders we must teach and model “bearing with one another with love.

Every one of us has faults and areas where we have not yet developed Christian character. If we are not willing to love (put up with) other people's personal flaws, then why should others love us in our imperfection. Leaders can be very critical of other ministries in their community especially if they are having some success. And then we wonder why people are so critical of us and even leave the church.

v) As leaders we must teach and model how to “yield to the Spirit” and not to the flesh or the devil. The purpose of unity is to have peace in the church. Where there is strife, division, quarrelling, fighting, jealousy, and envy great unrest is prevalent. These are the products of our sinful nature and of the devil, but we are not to live after the flesh, and we are to resist the devil and yield to the Holy Spirit. Blessed or happy are those that are peace makers. Peace is “the bond” that holds the church together. Resolving disputes will bring peace and will keep us bound together in harmony.

vi) As leaders we must teach and model the importance of unity by being willing to deal with disharmony both personally and corporately.

We must personally be willing to go to our brother if we know we have offended him or that he is offended with us. Seek peace for it is the glue that holds our churches together. Corporately as leaders we must deal with those that cause disharmony in the church and those who willfully continue in sin.

This is where many churches fail because they are not willing to deal with the people who cause disunity. They hope some way it will go away but in fact it almost always gets worse and leads to division and strife and splits and good people will leave because they cannot live in an atmosphere of continual strife.

1 Cor 14:33 (Living) **33** “God is not one who likes things to be disorderly and upset. He likes harmony ... “

Unity is very important but not at any cost.

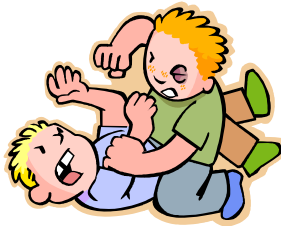
—Peter James Lee, one of 60 Episcopal bishops who voted to approve the appointment of Gene Robinson, an openly gay man, as bishop of New Hampshire said, "If you must make a choice between heresy and schism, always choose heresy."

We cannot compromise the moral absolutes of the scriptures to avoid disagreement.

Differences will sometimes justify people going their separate ways but we can never justify causing division or strife in a church or carrying grudges against those we disagree with.

Paul and Barnabus strongly disagreed whether John Mark should accompany them on an upcoming trip, it resulted in them going separate ways. The reality is that disagreements in judgment and doctrine happen and sometimes the best thing to do is agree to disagree and let each person go on to do the work of the Lord. But let no anger and animosity continue but rather love and respect one another for this is God's commandment.

Disharmony



The New Testament church had to deal with disharmony

As leaders we have at our disposal the hand book (the Bible) for maintaining unity in the church and it tells us what to do when things happen that disrupt harmony in the church. The New Testament church had to handle trouble that happened in the first century. What did they do?

1. **THE PROBLEM:** *Acts 6:1-7* - Widows were being neglected resulting in the murmuring of the Grecians widows against Hebrews

THE SOLUTION: Leaders had to a) acknowledge there was a problem, b) make administrative changes c) Appointing those that could help in the work of the ministry. Grumbling and complaining ceased and unity was restored.

2. **THE PROBLEM:** *Acts 15:1 & 2* - Dissention and dispute over whether one was to be circumcised in order to be saved.

THE SOLUTION: Leadership called a meeting. Apostles and Elders met to discuss the doctrinal dissention and with the help of the Holy Spirit came to a decision as to what was right.

Leadership is essential for the maintaining of unity (Vrs.28-32). In the multitude of counselors there is wisdom and safety. They resolved the problem by making a leadership decision and let the people know that they were in agreement and they believed they had the mind of God on the matter. "It seems good to us and to the Holy Ghost." Unity was restored.

3. **THE PROBLEM:** *Acts 15:37-39* - Paul and Barnabas had had a quarrel over John Mark and contention was very sharp between them. They quarreled over a decision, It was a matter of judgment not a moral issue or what was biblically right or wrong.

THE SOLUTION: Leaders may experience contention because of a disagreement about what should be done. In this case they could not resolve the problem so each did what they felt was right from their perspective.

They held no grudge and if they were angry they did not carry it but forgave one another. *Col.3:13* - if you have a quarrel against any, forgive. It means to release them without any consequences. Often it is NOT a matter of Sin, but of personal opinion or how they see something. *Col. 3:14* (AMP) **put on** love - "which binds everything together in ideal harmony."

4. **THE PROBLEM:** *Gal.2:11*- Paul said, "I withstood him (Peter) to his face because he was to blame." (AMP says) "He was blamable and stood condemned."

THE SOLUTION: Peter received the reproof and we are not told what his reaction was. Paul reproved Peter with no malice (ill-feeling) against Peter. And if Peter was hurt or offended he let it go or forgave Paul. There is no indication that Peter held a grudge because we see Peter then writing in his letter-

2 *Peter 3:15*- "Our beloved brother Paul" according to the wisdom given unto him has written.

5. **THE PROBLEM:** *1 Cor. 3:1-5* – I am of Paul, I am of Apollas they said. They were comparing one preacher against another. They were not only for one but against another. Preferring one over another is a cause of dissention in many churches with preachers, song leaders etc. It is a cause of division.

THE SOLUTION: *1 Cor. 3:21-23* – Don't glory in men.

"That you may learn... not to think of men above that which is written, that no one be puffed up, one against another.(AMP).Inflated with pride and

boast in favor of one (minister and teacher) against another.” We should see God in each person and glorify God’s grace in that person.

God knows what we need and uses whomever he chooses to minister to us. We know that it isn’t just the food that tastes good that’s good for us. Taste alone is not the criteria for what is good for us. Some foods that are good for us we need to acquire a taste for, so it is with spiritual food.

6. PROBLEM: James writes of the contention that was in the church at the time and teaches them the basis of the problem and how to resolve it.

James 3:14 – Responding this disharmony he states the problem is “the fleshly, worldly, demonic influence (AMP) – “bitter jealousy (envy) and contention (rivalry, selfish, ambitious) in your heart do not pride yourselves in it and thus be in defiance of the truth.” *3:15* - This wisdom does not come from God but is of the world, the flesh and devilish. *4:1-5* – Lusts, friendship of the world, the devil and pride. (Only by pride comes contention = confusion and disunity.)

SOLUTION: *James 4:6-10* – Humbling oneself, (lowliness – *Eph. 4:2*) resist the devil, draw nigh to God, put away sin and double mindedness, be sorrowful after a Godly sort, that works repentance, and God will lift you up and exalt you in due time.

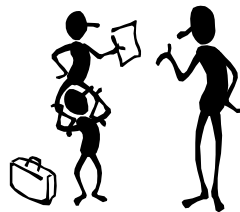
Col. 3:8-10 – (AMP). Put off these and put on the new man which is renewed in Knowledge (daily acquires new strength, fuller and more perfect Knowledge.

Col 3:12-15 – Love which binds everything together completely in ideal harmony and let the peace (soul harmony which comes) from Christ rule (act as umpire continually) in your hearts – deciding and settling with finality all questions that arise in your minds.

James 3:17 – The wisdom from above is peaceable. (peace- loving)

Being a peacemaker

Personally



1. Matt 18:15 (NIV) ¹⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over"

Go to your brother alone first, not to others. Do it with humility and be willing to share with them the sin they committed against you in hopes they will repent and it can all end right there without anyone else being involved.

2. Matt.5:23,-24 Go thy way and first be reconciled to thy brother. (Make peace)

Pride hinders many from taking this step saying, "If they have a problem let them come to me, why should I go to them, I have no problem with them." But so important is unity that the Lord says you go to them if you know they are offended at you, do it whether their offence is justified or not justified.

3. Gal. 6:1-2 If a man be overtaken in a fault restore him in meekness. Bear ye one another's burdens. Other people's faults are a burden that we are called to bear. "forbearing one another in love."
4. 2 Thess.3:14 -15 Keep no company with those who cause disunity. Verse 6 "Withdraw from them who are busy bodies. Busy in other men's affairs. "Some who are not busy in their own affairs but are over busied in that of others." Why should we withdraw? So they might be shamed.
5. Luke 17: 3 if thy brother repents - forgive him.
Verse: 4 Even if he wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, forgive him.

Corporately



The church corporately must together take any and all appropriate action to maintain the unity of the church in the bond of peace.

1. 1 Tim.5:19-20 Elders, when convicted of sin by two or three should be rebuked before all.
2. Rom. 16:17 ... those that cause divisions and offences contrary to doctrine avoid them if they will not submit to the truth (especially those that are teachers).
3. 1 Cor.5: 11 - Not to keep company with those who willfully continue in sin. Verse 13 therefore put away from you that wicked person.

Problems must be faced and dealt with so peace can be restored.

4. Matt 18:16-18 (NKJV). ¹⁶ "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' ¹⁷ "And if he refuses to hear them, tell *it* to the church. But if ¹ he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.

Unity requires leaders to be led by God and people to follow the leader as they follow the Lord.

Disharmony brings God no pleasure

Zech 11:7 (NRSV) ⁷ So, on behalf of the sheep merchants, I became the shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. I took two staves; one I named **Favor**, the other I named **Unity**, and I tended the sheep

Fasset-Brown Bible Commentary – Says **I took . . . two staves -- that is, shepherds' staves or rods (Ps 23:4). Symbolizing His assumption of the pastor's office.**

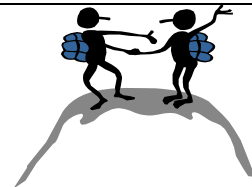
The assuming of the role of a pastor must include these two important things:

1. The proclamation of God's grace (that is Gods unmerited favor). That is we know we are only accepted by the fact that God offered us forgiveness because of what Jesus did on the Cross for us and it was not by our works or good behavior. When we really understanding God's great grace then it will not be so hard to accept others with their warts and all.
2. The proclamation of God's absolute insistence on us maintaining or keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A state of tranquility or peace is essential for the welfare of the flock.

The natural flock of sheep needs to have an atmosphere of peace in order to produce a good growth of wool and maximize reproduction of the flock.

When leaders fail to teach and practice the grace of God and insist that believers maintain the unity of the Spirit among the people the church becomes non productive. As it is in the natural so it will be in the spiritual.



Actions that promote unity

1. Preach, teach and exhort **everyone** to be peacemakers. Matt. 5:9 Blessed are the peace makers.

2. Encourage **everyone** to be quick to forgive. Col.3:13—“forgiving one another “in love.” “Bear ye one another’s burdens” Most complaints against others are a matter of opinion rather than sin or false doctrine. We are to forgive and not bear a grudge.
3. Exhort **everyone** to let love motivate their actions. 1 Peter 4:8 -For charity or love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 3:8 —Love as brethren - natural families have their times of contentions but they are soon forgotten and forgiven and they are always family no matter what.
4. Teach **everyone** the need to be courageous and do what is necessary to keep and restore unity to the church.
5. As leaders we **need to be courageous** if we are going to maintain unity in our local church. Courage to apply discipline if necessary and hold believers accountable to be peacemakers and insist they not be trouble makers.

Isaiah 60:1-5 ¹ Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you. ² For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: **but the LORD shall arise upon you, and his glory shall be seen upon you.** ³ And the Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes round about, and see: all **they gather themselves together**, they come to you: your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be nursed at your side. ⁵ **Then thou shall see, and flow together**, and your heart shall fear, and be enlarged; **because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto you**, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto you.

The glory of God cannot be seen in strife, division, quarreling and disharmony.

Unity is not conformity but people working out their differences and being tolerant or putting up with one another, being patient and humble with a loving attitude.