Introduction: Review

* So far we have learned to ask “What would Jesus do?” As the Body of Christ we are to reflect his attitude, words, do what he did, see people how he saw them, and treat people the way he treated them. He put flesh to the Word and so must we through good works.
* We learned to love one another as Christ loved us.
* We learned to accept one another as Christ’s accepted us

**Today our focus is on Unity**

*“How good and pleasant it is,*

*When God’s people live together in unity.”* Psalm 133:1

 – And how horrible it can be when they do not!

“*I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”* John 17:22-23

Jesus – specifically highlights l**ove... and unity**… as two qualities that will have the greatest impact on others.

And unity addresses the human race’s nemesis. It’s Achilles heel. The one unsolvable problem: The ability to get along. People do not know how to get along.

The human race has a penchant for fighting, bickering, criticizing, to rage, lose it… personal level and national … history is laced with conflict…

Examples:

* Columbine – Sandy Hook – Las Vegas - sadly, long list
* Chicago, gun violence …in every US city, city of the world
* Ethnic cleaning
* Conflict b/W East and West, Muslim and non-muslim world
* Tension between nations – shooting missiles over each other
* Racial tension – black/blue lives matter
* Conflict on our campuses and at political rallies – used to have civil discourse – a growing intolerance
* 9/11
* Conflict in the homes
* Conflict within families
* Bullying in school, cyber bullying
* Friction in the workplace …. distrust of the company vs. worker
* Tension between co-workers..
* Christians are “no better.” Think of all the church conflicts. We can easily slide into the gutter.

More than ever the world needs the church to be the church and live out who it is in Christ. The world needs the answer to this unsolvable problem and we have it! Christ is the answer – **In him is the power of the new person**

2 Corinthians 5:5 says: *“if anyone is in Christ. A new creation. The old person is gone. The new person has arrived”*

 The Old Testament predicted the effect of the Messiah on a person’s life: “*I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”*  Ezekiel 36:26

What was predicted in the OT is proclaimed in the New Testament: *“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.”* Ephesians 2:15-16

**I. What is Biblical Unity?**

*“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, 4not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.* Philippians 2:1-4

“If” - There is an urgency in his voice. Paul, like us, lived in violent times: gladiators, crucifixions, people fed to the lions, children were treated like property, they were cruel to the ill and frail. Families abandoned them to die in the street. It was an inhumane time. They experienced endless world wars: Assyria, Babylon, Greeks – Alexander the Great, Romans, Egyptians, the barbarians etc.

Unity has three components:

1. Unity is being “Like-minded” (vs.2) – NOT mean: “have the same opinion.” “same-mindedness,” think the same, agree on everything.

Ephesians 4 is all about unity. First Paul painstakingly sets the foundation for unity. “Here’s what we have in common” and if we focus on them, they can miniaturize any difference that has power to divide.”

One body, one Holy Spirit, one Hope, one Lord, one Faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all.

Then in the same passage he goes on to tell us  **“we are different:”**

 “*But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.”*

Ephesians 4:7

Meaning we have different gifts and roles, which means we will all see things differently because we see things from different perspectives.

We are called the “body of Christ.” Some are hands, others feet, another person is a knee, arm, elbow etc. We are different and will see things differently.

When lifting a heavy object my hand, brain, back and legs all see things differently and they talk to one another. If they work together on a single goal, i.e. lifting the object. They can get it done IF they work together.

Whose idea was this? Answer: God’s idea!

Why would he do that? Is God setting us up for conflict?

God did the same with the genders. He took all his divine traits and split them up between the two genders. Why? To make us miserable in our marriages? To cause us to fight?

No ….we do that. We allow differences to divide and it’s a result of an inner wound we have, a feeling we carry around.

The reason he made us different was in order to bring us together. To teach us to work together so we learn to get along and achieve something greater than we could alone!

What sector of our culture has realized this? Answer: The corporate world. Ex. George Lucas did not hire famous stand-out stars to be in his films. He hired teams of people who interacted well together.

My son Alan just got hired by Boeing and they hired in teams.

When I grew up it was all about competition in the workplace. Today the word is: collaboration! We produce better results when we collaborate instead of compete

Like-minded means **“to set your mind on the same thing.**” To have a single goal or focus. It’s the same thing as what Paul said in Philippians 1:27 *“contend as one person* ***for the faith of the Gospel.”***

*“Contend”* is an athletic term: = “To engage in an athletic contest”

We relate to this analogy. All baseball teams are made up of many players, and each have differing roles, positions, gifts, abilities etc. But they have a singular focus: To win

The church too is to have a singular focus. What is it? Look at the first great all church conflict: Read Acts 1 and 15. They all got together are argued and debated the issue to how to pass on the faith to Gentiles. The decision?

*“It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God.”* Acts 15:19

What was the deciding factor? Answer: The Gospel, not who won the vote or who won the debate. They knew their business and made it the focus and not all the varying side issues that distracted them and caused division.

Walking in unity means we do not necessarily have to see eye to eye in order to walk hand in hand.

**2nd component**

2. Unity is also about having “the same love” (vs.2)

*he humbled himself
    by becoming obedient to death—
        even death on a cross!* Philippians 2:6-8

Love as defined by the cross is “sacrificial service for the good of others at personal cost”

When we love in this way we experience a fresh wave of God’s love which has the power to heal us and enable usto love each other in two ways:

*“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.”* (vss. 3-4)

Our love for each other is expressed by our taking off selfishness and conceit and putting on valuing each other.

“Love begins when someone else’s needs are more important than your own.” *~*Gordon Fee

**3rd component**

Unity is being “one in spirit and purpose” (vs.2)

Being like-minded means to have a single focus. Being one in spirit refers to: *“contend as one person (soul)”* Philippians 1:27

It refers to all the parts cooperating with each other and putting our all into it. The leg, hand, back and mind all work together and they all give it their best.

Work together … hand, leg, back

Put it all together, biblical unity….

“Is a bond all believers share due to the love they have experienced through Christ, a love that inspires both their love for one another and an all-in commitment to the ministry of the Gospel.”

“Is a love that a diverse body of believers share for Christ and one another that empowers them to act as one person, with one mission (The Gospel), under the leadership of one Lord, Jesus Christ.”

**II. How Do We Get There?**

We need to reminder ourselves and repeat, experientially what we have in Jesus!

Interesting**…** all four things he mentions that we have in Christ are things that address our inner needs and fears which lie at the root of most conflicts.

It’s why we have a hard time getting along.

If we realize what we have in Jesus and drill down on them and let them shape us, we will lose the urge to fight and will prefer to love, serve, forgive, refuse to be offended.

1st things we have in Christ:

*“Encouragement from being united with Christ” (vs. 1)*

As part of this teaching Paul mentions the 2 things that cause conflict. One is the pattern and one is the root:

 *“Do nothing out of selfish ambition(pattern) or vain conceit(the root).” (vs. 3)*

“Selfish ambition” means “hyper-fighting” or a proneness to fighting.

We all have an “ignition switch,” an area of tenderness, a nerve that when someone hits it we “Flash” we flame up and lose our tempers

Examples: When people make us feel stupid

 When they discount your feelings

 When we are belittled by others over something we say or how we look.

Ex: Tailgate a person or cut them off accidently and people can flyoff the handle and rage at you!

Vain Conceit means: “empty glory” - the need to feel important, proud, you matter, you are valued

This is caused by a fear that is deeply rooted in us all. We fear, deep down, that we do not matter, that we are just “dust in the wind.” Even those who believe we are here by accident find this notion horrid. So what do we do because we can’t stand the thought that life is without meaning or purpose and as a result nothing we do does matter.

It’s a defensive mechanism…

We try and manufacture importance! We look for reasons to take pride. Examples: Education, accomplishments, achievements, house/possessions, position, spouse (a trophy one like my wife Holly! :0 ), family, the accomplishments of the kids etc.

More than anything else we fear being ignored or forgotten. It’s one reason people fear dying. It’s eternal forgotten-ness. You die and go into this eternal darkness. Forever forgotten. Everything you did will one day be forgotten as if you never mattered. It’s also why we memorialize ourselves. We hate the idea that we will be forgotten.

What wounds us like nothing else is when people treat us as if we are a nobody, that our opinions do not matter!

So how does the **“Encouragement (Comfort) of union”** heal us of our fear and our inner tenderness that causes us to snap?

Being unite to Christ says to us: You’ve been adopted into God’s Family! We are royalty. We are children of the King! We are “Counsel to the President.” We are extremely important. We are the “body of Christ.” God has picked us for his team. He invites us to be part of his ministry to reach the world and redeem it. What an honor!

He doesn’t ignore us! He’s our “Good Shepherd.” God is omniscient. He even knows the number of hairs on our head! (I have fewer each year!)

When you realize who you are in Christ, that you are valuable to God and are very important to him, you don’t need to manufacture your own glory. You are affirmed to the moon, which Makes you less prone to be hurt because your ego isn’t so fragile. Not dependent on the opinions of others to feel good about yourself. You know how God feels about you – He loves you!

Union with Christ not only heals our deepest wound but also remedies our biggest need. I’ve heard it said:

“No one is born a bigot” – saying? It’s learned!

Problem: Ignorance.

Remedy – Education

We’ve been diagnosing our problems and banking on this remedy for millennia “How’s that working for us?” Are we any better off? Are racial relations better or worse than they were 10-20 years ago?

Our problem is not ignorance. We are a well-educated society. More and more people have college degrees. Education is not the remedy we need. We don’t need more information we need an inner transformation! We need:

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* Ezekiel 36:26

Our problem is spiritual. We have left God out. As a result we do not have the power to overcome our fears, wounds, and the habit of fighting with one another.

Ex. I counseled a woman whose dad had raped her. She was angry with God. She thought God was the problem. The truth was, God wasn’t the problem. The problem was the lack of God in her dad’s life. Had God been in her father’s heart. Had the love of Jesus touched him and healed him he would not have done this monstrous act against her. He would have loved he, cherished her, protected her and caused he to flourish in her life.

What she needed was God. If she invited God into her life he will affirm her to the moon and will heal her of the wounds she carried around her, including but not limited to, the sense of worthlessness. Over time she would be able to forgive her father and move on in her life. Over time, God would begin to use her experience to offer hope and help to others. And way down the road at some point God would redeem the wound so completely that there could come a day that the wound would be a badge of honor, something she would cherish – NOT the sin, not the violation. That would always be EVIL.

What she would cherish was the fact and experience that God turned it to good in her life and to the blessing of many women within her sphere of influence. She would experience an incredible sense of significance that would bless her and fill her with overflowing joy and pride.

2nd thing we have in Christ:

*“****Comfort from his love” (vs. 1)*** – It’s a basic of human need – love. And when we do not experience it as a child from our parents or some significant other it can destroy us. It wounds us deeply.

Example: Kelly Clarkson from “Piece by piece”

And all I remember is your back
Walking towards the airport, leaving us all in your past
I traveled fifteen hundred miles to see you
Begged you to want me, but you didn't want to

But piece by piece, he collected me
Up off the ground, where you abandoned things and
Piece by piece he filled the holes that you burned in me
At six years old and you know….

And all of your words fall flat
I made something of myself and now you want to come back
But your love, it isn't free, it has to be earned
Back then I didn't have anything you needed so I was worthless

The good news is we all have a Father who does love us and not like Kelley’s father… “It has to be earned” God’s love is unconditional and if you let it in it will heal you piece by piece. God will fills the holes burned into us by others to the degree we will have enough love in our tank for ourselves AND others.

And it’ll be a deep, one that is sacrificial. Instead of taking lives, it gives up one’s life for the good of others. Instead of being self-protective it runs into the face of danger in order to save and protect others.

3rd thing we have in Christ

*“Common sharing (fellowship) in the Spirit” (vs. 1)*

There is a shift in the verse from “his love” to “the fellowship in the spirit” referring not to the Holy Spirit but the human spirit. As followers of Jesus we automatically are connected spiritually. We have fellowship with each other.

We share a spirit to spirit connection.

Example: The experience of traveling anywhere in the world and striking up a conversation with a person and experiencing an immediate familial connection when you discover that the other person is a believer.

Another example: Ever watch those videos of when people are reunited with blood relative? The person may be a complete stranger but when they meet the tears pour out, they embrace and feel this immediate familial love for each other. They don’t even know each other yet they feel this connection – a spirit to spirit connection sealed in blood. They are blood relative.

As believers we share a similar bond deal by the blood of Jesus.

*“His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross.”* Ephesians 2:15-16

We are Blood-relatives!

Do blood relatives differ? Experience disputes? Disagree? Irritate each other? Are you still family and will do anything for your family?

Do blood relatives come to a place of full acceptance? At first the person’s idiosyncrasies grated on you. But over time they become endearing to you: “that’s mom, that’s dad, that’s crazy uncle Frank” and you know what… I love them because of those traits now. They used to bother me but now they don’t because that is who they are! That makes them their unique self!

4th thing we have in Christ

*“Tenderness and compassion” (vs. 1)*

This addresses another fear we have deep down. Deep down most of us feel that, when it comes to God, we are a disappointment, a screw up. We feel we let let him down, are not deserving of grace, but are deserving of judgement.

Ex. When bad things happen what do we ask: “What did I do to deserve it”

Another reason why people fear dying is because they fear facing God in the final judgement. Judgement day is a fearful thing because we fear God is going to look down at us and say: “Close but no cigar.”

It’s how most people view God. We think God first reaction to our mistakes is to get the belt out but this is not true of God.

*The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
    slow to anger, abounding in love….****he does not treat us as our sins deserve
    or repay us according to our iniquities.***Psalm 103:10

Hebrew 4:15 “he sympathizes with us”

I John 1:9 Tells us what to do when we mess up. It does not tell us to beat up on ourselves. It tells us to simply confess to God what you did. That’s it!

In fact the thing we fear most is what Christ experienced for us on the cross. We fear being forsaken, forgotten, ignored. He experienced God forsakenness. God ignored his request. He turned his back on him so he could turn his face toward us. He was rejected so we would be welcomed!

He was forsaken so we may be treasured! We may be brought in as family!

If you are in the church long enough you will experience God’s tenderness and love and it will create a desire and power in you that makes you want to return the favor and treat others the same way. When touched by compassion it makes you compassionate.

Summary – Let’s put it all together:

Paul is saying…. We have 4 things in Christ

1. We are united with Christ – Christ is in you…. you have experienced an awakening and are tapped into “fresh streams of living water”
2. You have experienced his love – a love that wouldn’t allow anything to get in between us and Him. A love which caused him to toss himself on top of our humanity to take the “bullets” for us.
3. You have His Spirit and are connected to other believers in a way that is more profound than blood relatives. We share a spirit to spirit connection that is far deeper than any other relationship.
4. You’ve experienced God’s compassion and tenderness toward. He hasn’t condemned you. He redeemed you buy dying in your place.

If you let these four truths in and allow them to be rooted in you. You will:

1. Have a power in you that is able to transform you in incredible ways. It’ll heal you from an inner emptiness that seeks to be satisfied in order to overcome your deeply held belief that you are insignificant – merely dust in the wind.

2. You will have a love that affirms you so profoundly that you will not only have enough love to nurture yourself but you will be able to love and nurture others at personal sacrifice.

3. You will have a Family that’s global. You can never be alone. Never lack hope. Never feel as if you are helpless. You have a Family surrounding you that is willing to do anything for you. Just let us know… billion people who will love and care for you just as you are…. Partner with you through life …

**4.** You will always have a place where you belong…. “a place where everybody knows your name and they are always glad you came”

And you will have a God and His family who will not criticize you, nit-pick, talk behind your back, judge you, treat you harshly or hypocritically but treat you with tenderness and compassion.

5. When this happens. When we actually walk in unity as a church we will bring God great joy. We will be a people who walk hand in hand with ardent love for each other as we focus on the only thing worth fighting for – the Gospel of Christ.

If we take all this to heart.. then all the things that once divided, cause irritation, misunderstanding, the issues that seem so important, seen in light of what we have in Jesus will be seen for what they are: distractions by the enemy, petty things that are insignificant and not worth one moment of our time.

We will be the church God longs for.

We are like first responders. First responders know their business. They are laser focused on their mission. They run into burning buildings to save lives. We need that same laser focus because our world is on fire. People do not know how to get along and people are dying as a result. We need to show people the answer to their problem. In Christ all hostilities can be put to rest and as a people we can walk hand in hand with one another even though we may not see eye to eye. Then peace my finally take over our world and what a wonderful place it would be!

*“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”* Ezekiel 36:26