

UNITED WITH One Another

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Preacher: James Barnett

[0 : 00] Imagine meeting a person and you find out they're a Christian and they even go to a church just like yours. They go to an Anglican church in Sydney. And you're thinking, great, maybe this person can be a friend.

And you find out that they even like the same sort of Christian music that you like. Maybe they could be a great friend. They go to a church on a Sunday. They even go to a community group throughout the week.

They believe Jesus died and was raised three days later and that he's going to return and that they are waiting for him to return. And you are thinking, this is great. Could this be true?

I've just met this random person in the street and they are so similar to me. We are exactly the same. Could this be true? Maybe God has put this person in my life for this moment.

Maybe this is the person I'm going to marry. This is amazing. Maybe this is going to be my best friend. Who knows this is, could this really be true? Could this person be so similar to me?

[0 : 59] Maybe I could be united with them like that. And then you ask them that most important question. What time do you go to church on a Sunday? Your heart's beating.

Is this going to be the one? And you wait and they say, I go to church at night. Oh, and your heart is broken. You heretic, you shout. How could you go to church at night?

Now, this is a purely hypothetical situation. We wouldn't be as fickle as this, would we? But how united are we as a church?

What does it mean for us to be united? And what is it that unites us? Is it just our preferences for church on a Sunday? Or is there something deeper that unites us with one another?

Today, we're looking at the command to be united with one another. Last week, we looked at the command to love one another. And part of that is being united.

[2 : 03] There's one command that we'll see that says to be united. And then there's a number of other commands to be in harmony, to have the same mind with one another that we're going to look at as we continue in our series on one another.

Today, we're going to see the division that brings unity. We're going to see what our unity is in. And then we're going to see the things that we should not have unity in.

So I'm going to pray for us as we think about being united. Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you so much for your love for us.

And I thank you that we can be united here this morning, that we can be a diverse family gathered together. And I thank you for Jesus who unites us.

Help us to think about this and be a family that loves each other like you love us. Amen. So we're going to see this morning that unity starts with division.

[3 : 04] Let me read from Jesus' words in Luke chapter 12. Jesus said, Jesus takes existing families.

He takes existing people groups and cultures. And he doesn't always take everyone from the family. Maybe you're sitting with your family today.

Or maybe you were the only person in your family that is following Jesus at the moment. Jesus said he didn't come to bring peace. He came to bring division.

Because Jesus has to tear apart the structures of the world. He has to tear apart families and social groups to make something new.

And we get a picture of what this new thing is in Galatians 3 that was read for us. From verse 26. So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith.

[4 : 25] For all of you who are baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile. Neither slave nor free. Nor is there male or female.

For you are all one in Christ. In Christ we are all sons. Sons who have the right to an inheritance from God. We are brought into one family. So Jesus has taken us from where we were. Whether we were slaves or free. Whether we were Jew or Gentile. Old or young. Male or female. Born in Sydney. Born in the Philippines. And we are made one family in Christ. In Jesus' death and resurrection he takes a divided world. We who divide on anything. Preference, taste, color of skin.

And he brings us to a new family united as one. Now we might think that unity and harmony is brought about just by sweeping problems under the rug.

[5 : 28] Maybe you do that as a parent. Just stop fighting. Let's not talk about our divisions and the conflict between us. If there's conflict let's just hide it away. Let's just sweep the conflict under the rug.

We see that in our politicians sometimes. It seems that politicians would just prefer to arrest and put in jail anybody who disagrees with them. Let's just pretend that everything is fine.

But Jesus doesn't just come and pretend that everything is fine. He doesn't just come to make us happy. He doesn't try and do a small thing like that. Jesus actually comes and tears us apart.

And tears us from our families and our social groups. And he makes what we value him above all else. He does this so that we have unswerving loyalty to Jesus before anyone else.

Because he offers us so much more than just simple happiness. He offers us the opportunity to be the very child of God. Now my kids love Lego.

[6 : 37] I'm not sure if your kids love Lego or if you remember stepping on Lego. Lego. And what will often happen is one of my children, let's say Tamara, she might build something out of Lego.

And she will build this great creation. And Isaac, he'll have the instructions. And he'll be building something. And then he'll need a particular piece. And there might only be one of them.

And it just so happens that it's in the thing that Tamara built. I don't know how this happens, but it seems to happen every time. And so for Isaac to build this thing, there has to be conflict.

He has to tear down what Tamara has built. And there's never any problems. I'd tell a small lie.

There's always conflict. Because Isaac needs something Tamara has.

He has to tear that down so that he can make something new. And Jesus takes us from our families, from our culture, from the things that we cling very tightly to.

[7 : 38] Whether it's our friendships, whether it's family above all else. Maybe it's our identity as people. He takes us out of this old and he makes something new.

He brings divisions so that he can build a new united family. Jesus has taken me from being a white Australian, post-modern, materialistic, selfish man.

And he has made me God's son. Loved me. He's brought me into God's family. A family who love one another. And that's who I am first.

As I follow Jesus, the gospel needs to continually interact and rebuke me. As I kind of want to go back to being that Australian, materialistic, selfish man.

I like being an Australian. But there's many parts of me and the culture that I've come from that need to be rebuked. That I need to move away from.

[8 : 44] And I need to be redeemed by God. And the gospel will keep doing the same for all of us here. As it takes us from where we are and brings us into a new family.

A new culture. United together. Let's make sure that we don't just fall back into the place that God has taken us from.

Into the values of the culture that God has taken us from. But we have the values of our new family together. So Jesus' death.

His blood has birthed one new people. We've gone from being individuals in different places.

Different cultures. Different people. To being one new family together.

But what does this body look like? What does it look like to be united as a family together? Adrian read from 1 Corinthians before. From 1 Corinthians 12.

[9 : 46] But in this extended letter from Paul to the church in Corinth. It's a very divided church that he sends this letter to.

And so he starts with a command in chapter 1 verse 10. I appeal to you brothers and sisters. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. That all of you agree with one another.

In what you say. And that there be no divisions among you. But that you be perfectly united in mind and thought. He asked them to be united in mind and thought.

And that they would agree with one another. Because this church is fighting amongst themselves. There's a lot of sin. They're divided over who the right leadership is.

Some say I follow Paul. Others say I follow Jesus. And Paul says I follow Christ. The church were committing all kinds of sexually immoral acts. They were boasting about how immoral they were.

[10:46] Some people were coming together as the church. And they were getting drunk. And they were stuffing themselves with food. And other people didn't even have any food. There was no unity.

There was no family. These people were focusing on themselves. And ripping apart the church in Corinth. This church which God had taken to unite into a new family.

Well they were going back to their old way of doing things. And Paul deals with this division. He paints a picture of what this family is to look like. From 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 12.

Just as a body though one has many parts. All of its many parts form one body. So as it is with Christ.

For we were all baptized by one spirit so as to form one body. Whether Jews or Gentiles. Slave or free. And we were all given the one spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but many.

[11:52] We as individuals from many different places. From different walks of life. Are brought into a new family.

And Paul says that we all have value. We are all different as individuals. But all individuals have value as they make up one body. As they are united with one another.

And one of the great things about this. That Jesus unites us into one body. Is that it doesn't flatten us all out. It doesn't say that we all have to be exactly the same.

To be part of this family you don't have to look like everyone else. I loved having the kids up here this morning. Loved seeing them model how it is we can communicate in different languages.

We don't all have to be the same. We don't all have to speak the same language. If you speak a different language to me. You are definitely still loved by Jesus. And we can still be united as a family.

[12:56] But Jesus died for individuals. He died for Dan Leslie. He died for Adam. He died for all of us as individuals.

To bring us into a family. But we still have our names. We still have our unique gifts and abilities. We are very different.

But we are brought together and united. And so in verse 15 of chapter 12. It says now if the foot should say. Because I am not a hand. I do not belong to the body.

It would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say. Because I am not an eye. I do not belong to the body. It would not for that reason stop being part of the body. We actually miss out.

If we are not united. A church that is united with different skills and gifts. It can do so much more than a church divided. A church that is just made up of feet.

[13:59] Give me a career choice. What could I describe a foot as? Anybody want to throw a career choice at me? It doesn't have to be your own. Podiatrists.

We don't all have to be the feet of podiatrists. If we would. Where would be the optometrists of our eyes? We need many different things.

We are many different things. And God unites us together. I am sorry if there is any podiatrists here. I don't know if there is. We want to be a church of different people.

People from every nation, tribe and tongue. And Paul is saying that individuals are not made to be individual. People are not made to be alone. But to be brought into a team.

Into a family. Where individuality is discovered. As part of being united in Christ. Verse 24 of chapter 12.

[14:57] God has put the body together. Giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it. So that there should be no division in the body. But that its parts should have equal concern for one another.

Another version says. So that the members may have the same care for one another. There is value in all the different parts of us.

As we care for one another. And if we suffer. We are to suffer together. Now it's easy to value some parts. And treat them with more honor.

And to ignore others. But we should have the same care for one another. Being united as the family of God here at St. Paul's. Means that we look out for one another.

We love. We care. We sacrifice. It's that description of love from last week. It's to show servant hearted. Radical and sacrificial love to one another.

[15 : 55] We are to have the same heart as Jesus has for one another. We can't do Christianity on our own.

But the great thing is we don't have to. God has richly blessed us by bringing us together. Because God takes individuals and he brings us into a family where we can express our individuality. And it can be enjoyed. I'm so thankful for people who speak other languages. Because it means we can all praise God in different tongues.

I'm thankful for the people who are translating right now. Because it means we can be united together. We need different people. Imagine a community made of people that were exactly like you.

Imagine you and everyone is exactly the same. I'm not quite sure what you'd think of that. But I think after a time you would get bored.

[16 : 58] You'd get bored of everyone being the same as you. We need different types of people. Those who are good at encouraging. Those who are good at leading us in music as we worship God.

Those who model a prayerful life. Those who can teach God's word. Those who are good at administration. Now if you've ever needed physiotherapy, you'd understand this.

Has anybody had to go to a physio before? If the body is out of whack, it's often not an isolated issue. It seems to me, now I'm not a physiotherapist.

I'm just going to put this out there. Is there any physiotherapists up here? Do they want to come up and help me? No? Okay, fine. It seems that if you've got an issue with your hips, you don't just work on your hips.

You need to work on abs and back and thighs. And if you've got a problem with your neck, a physio will go, it's because the way you walk is putting impact on your foot and it's causing issue all the way up.

[18 : 06] And it's then causing problems in your neck. Does that sound about right? That sounds like something a physio would say, doesn't it? And so, you know, when you're, so the physio will say, go to the gym, work on these muscles.

Don't just work out on the glamour muscles. Don't just work the biceps. Don't just work the chest. Because it'll curve your back over. How is our body, church?

How are we going being united to one another? Are we giving more honour to those who appear glamorous? Are we just working the glamour muscles of our church, but it's actually causing us to be bent over as a body and suffering as we're not united together?

Is there someone in your community group? Is there someone sitting next to you who's feeling disconnected? That actually needs to be united to this body, to this family?

Does it just need something simple like saying, hey, God loves you and you're an important part of this community? What about you? Are you united in this family?

[19 : 19] Are you connected to the community here? Have you allowed the excuse of busyness or work getting in the way of being connected here as a family?

Is it pulling you out of the body of church? Let me encourage all of us to reach out and encourage and unite those around us.

And if you are feeling disconnected, don't just leave it there. Go to our Connect desk at morning tea. Come and talk to myself. Grab someone else.

And say, I really want to be connected in here. Because just like that image of the body, if part of us is not working well, if part of us is not working and connected in, we are all going to suffer.

So Jesus has taken us from the place where we're at. He's taken us from our communities, our cultures and families, and he's brought us into one new family together where we can be united and build up and love one another.

[20 : 28] But does this mean we have unity here at all costs? Is there any risk of being united together as a church?

I was listening to a sermon by a pastor called John Piper recently, and he was describing something that happened in his church around 60 years ago.

He said that the church was very united, and they took a vote to not allow African American people in their church. And the vote was unanimous.

They voted to not allow African Americans in their church. The church was united, but they had clearly cut their arm or their leg off their body of a church.

They had united, but they were not healthy. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1 to have the same mind with one another. Because there are core issues.

[21 : 30] Paul said to have the same mind, but there are some issues that are negotiable. Some issues there can be flexibility on, and there are other issues that there is no flexibility on.

Paul has an account of disunity in the early church, and shows an issue that is a non-negotiable. It shows a core issue.

It's from Galatians chapter 2. Let me read. When Cephas, who is Peter, came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.

And so what's happened is that Peter pulled back from fellowship and being united with the Gentiles. Jesus has made one new body out of those who are Jews and those who are not Jews, but Peter had pulled back from that.

[22 : 42] He'd cut himself off. And so Paul came and had firm words with him. For the Christian, the news of the gospel is that we, who are a divided people, we who are from many different places, God has made us one new family in the death of Christ.

That is a non-negotiable. We can't say, no, no, Jesus and this church, we're not for African-American people, like that church of John Piper's.

We can't say, like Peter, this church is for non-Jews. Because Jesus, in his death and resurrection, has made us one new family from many different backgrounds.

Paul values the unity of the church so much that he confronts Peter. Unity of the church is so important that these two leaders, he didn't just let it be an issue on the side.

He didn't just try and sweep it under the rug. He didn't just try and get along with Peter. This conflict actually brought unity. Unity is so important that there can be conflict to get it.

[23 : 53] But it's important that this unity is over non-negotiable issues. Because as we talk about unity and things that are non-negotiable, I think we as Christians can often go one of two different ways.

We can often say that everything is on this side, we're not going to negotiate about anything.

Everything is a gospel issue. And we're not going to budge one bit on anything.

You know, that silly illustration from the start, if you don't go to the morning service, well, you clearly aren't a Christian, and so I'm not going to budge. You use a different translation to me. You know, you don't sing the same songs as me.

I am not going to budge. Everything is a gospel issue. Or, we can say that, you know what, unity is so important. Unity is the really important thing, and we have to be flexible on everything, even the gospel.

So we can go one of two ways. We can say that everything is a gospel issue, and we will have no flexibility at all. Or we can say, yeah, we'll be flexible on anything. What if you like? It doesn't matter as long as we're together.

[25 : 04] I think these are the two places we can often go to. But we need to find a third way, where we fight for what is non-negotiable, but we have flexibility on the things that we can have flexibility on.

An example of walking this line between these two positions is former Archbishop Marcus Lone. Marcus Lone was the Archbishop of Sydney between 1966 and 1982, and in this time, he received a letter.

It was from the Pope, and it said that Pope VI, Pope Paul VI, was visiting Sydney. And the Australian Council of Churches organized an event for all of the religious leaders to get together and show unity together.

Does anybody remember this? One person. Oh, a couple of people. Wonderful. And Archbishop Lone was left with a decision. Does he attend and show unity with people from totally different

places and totally different beliefs about God and Jesus?

Or does he show disunity with the wider community? He expressed his position very simply. I find this most disconcerting and very embarrassing, he said.

[26 : 27] I do not expect to attend. There is sure to be much fuss in the press. I love the word fuss in that context. However, I am convinced that until there is an agreed doctrinal confession, any get-together of this kind only increases the elements of disunity.

He was not able to be united even though the Roman Catholic Church believes many similar things. But the Roman Catholic Church taught that the Pope is infallible.

He cannot make mistakes and he's the head of the church. Whereas, we would believe that that's Jesus. He said that justification depends not solely upon Christ's work but on our work as well. Whereas for Archbishop Lone and for us, it is not our works that saves us but Christ's alone. And the Roman Catholic Church believes that tradition is equally as important as God's word in the Bible.

Whereas Archbishop Lone and we would hold that our tradition is helpful but we continually need to come back to what God says in his word. And so Archbishop Lone had a very respectful but clear division with the rest of the religious community.

[27 : 49] This was a massive issue in the press at the time. But unity, he didn't just be united because there was something more important. It was a gospel issue.

As we've seen from Paul, unity in the cross of Christ is the most important because that is what brings us unity. That is what brings us together as a family and not just preferences.

Archbishop Lone couldn't stand alongside those who didn't believe that it's Christ's work on the cross that brings us to be a family together. And he caused division over what was a core issue, a non-negotiable.

Now just like Paul, Archbishop Lone showed that it's not just that we are to be united. We don't just have unity at the cost of everything else.

But that we are to be united in the cross. So how do we walk between these two lines? How do we go being united with one another?

[28 : 57] Are you more likely to be on this side, a bit more hard-lined, a bit less flexible, wanting to say that everyone has to believe the exact same thing as you?

Or are you on this side? Are you a little bit too flexible? Are you really keen to have unity? But sometimes you let the gospel slip away.

I think my problem in the past and our problem here could be that, well I know, I'll speak for myself, that I can be a little bit too arrogant and think that my expression of Christianity is the best and only one.

And if you don't exactly believe what I believe, well you're just wrong, full stop and you can't be a Christian. And so instead of finding unity in the gospel like Paul did and Paul, when he brought Peter back and Archbishop Lone attempted to do, I push people away if they are different to me. Is that your natural inclination? I think in the past we can squabble over the things that just aren't important.

[30 : 17] Instead of letting the gospel that unites us bring us together as we love one another. And if we are loving, that means we are sacrificing our preferences.

We need to sit in this uncomfortable space where we consider the things that we hold to and think, are these my preferences or are these core non-negotiables?

Let's unite over the things that are non-negotiable. That it is Jesus who unites us in his death and resurrection and not squabble over the things that don't matter.

Now, I want to leave you with one picture of what being a united church could look like. Let's just imagine, it's been a bit windy lately. Let's just imagine if there was a really big gust of wind this morning and it uprooted our whole church and we were plonked in Sydney Harbour.

And our captain appears, it's Jesus. We've got Jesus at the front of our boat and he is setting the direction for us. We're all united in this boat together.

[31 : 26] We're all now sitting at oars and we're rowing this giant boat of a church together and Jesus is telling us the way to go. He is saying, go and make disciples of all nations. And then, we've got that eye patch wearing, peg legged, pirate hatted first mate, Steve Jeffrey.

He's listening to the captain and he's telling us whether we need to go faster or slower. He sets the pace as we follow Jesus' direction.

Maybe he's got one of those big drums and he's beating the drum and he's picking up pace for us as we need to be faster as the church or slower. He pounds the drum and we row those oars in time as we are united together as one body.

All of us very diverse but going in the same direction as Jesus points under the leadership of our captain and our first mate. What a picture of being united, following Jesus, going in the same direction, to see people become and made disciples of Jesus Christ.

Imagine if there was just a couple of us, just a couple, who thought, I don't want to go that way.

Actually, I think I know the best way to go and so they grab their oars and instead of going the same direction they actually start going backwards.

[32 : 52] Maybe they just go, it's a bit too hard this following Jesus stuff, I might just have a rest and so they just start having a sleep in the back and some people, well, they've gotten fed up with the whole thing, they've pulled their oars in and they're just beating each other over the head.

We would be going nowhere. Actually, we may start listing to one side, maybe we start going around in circles. Some people might still be working hard but because of the division, we would be going nowhere.

How much better is it to be united with one another as we follow Jesus, as we are made to be one new family? And that's why we have these words on the wall behind us.

They keep our eyes on the direction that Jesus sets because we want to have a look, treasure Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

We want to paddle in time with one another. We want to see God glorified and we want to see this diverse city of Chatswood around us come to know Jesus.

[34 : 03] Let me pray and let's do that. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you take us from being a divided people and that you unite us and that you bring us together even though we are diverse and different.

God, we ask that you would help us to set aside our preferences but that you would unite us in the cross of Christ.

Help us to be a church going in the same direction. To see you glorified and to see many people come to know and love you. Amen. Amen.