

Guarding the Unity

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[0 : 00] Well, if you are a guest with us this morning, welcome. Full disclosure, this might be a weird sermon for you.

And even if you have been coming for a while, if you've been attending church for many years, this might in fact be a weird sermon for you. Our typical practice is to preach straight through books of the Bible.

You open it up, chapter 1, verse 1, and you work your way all the way through to the end. And what this does is it helps us to get the big picture of what's going on in the book. It helps us to understand exactly what God is saying here in each book of the Bible.

But also what it does, what it means for me, is that I am not able to skip over difficult passages. Uncomfortable passages.

You know, you may not know this, but some passages of Scripture are less popular than others. Did you know that? Some passages are harder to swallow than others.

[1 : 04] And I don't have the luxury, you would notice, if I just happen to skip over a section of Scripture. And I don't want to do that anyways. Okay, we are here to submit ourselves to the Word of God.

Amen? Beginning to end. We want to receive what God has written in its entirety. So, let's open our Bibles to the book of Titus.

Once more, the book of Titus. We're going to be in chapter 3, verses 9 through 11 this morning. We're concluding the body of Paul's letter to Titus this morning.

Next week, Lord willing, we'll conclude with the conclusion of Paul's letter. But this morning, Paul is making one final appeal to Titus to defend the unity that the church was given in the gospel.

To defend the unity. This precious unity that Christ purchased for the church in the gospel. It was under attack by false teachers who had come to these young churches there in Crete.

[2 : 09] And so, mentor Paul writes to co-worker Titus and says, You must protect it. You must defend it. You must guard the unity of the church at all costs.

Keep the gospel and the glory of God at the center. Let's read it together now. Titus 3, verses 9 through 11. Paul says, Father God, you know the weight of a text like this.

So give me strength, Lord. And would you lead us through a difficult text even? Father, to worship. And to praise you for your goodness.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. All of us know someone who we would describe as a health nut. Someone who counts every calorie, measures every heartbeat, tracks every step, does everything that they can possibly do to ensure that so far as it depends upon them, that their body is healthy.

[3 : 55] I am not one of those people. I do care about my health. I try to exercise. I try to eat right. But I'm not obsessive in that way. Not entirely.

The other day, Amanda, we had a birthday party for Cobb. Amanda made two cakes. I had three pieces that night and one piece the next morning for breakfast. So I'm not entirely health obsessed like that.

But I do know that a basic part of taking care of your body is that you should, in general, avoid intaking what is bad for your health.

And if there is something in you that is dangerous to your body, you should remove it. Avoid intaking what is bad. Avoid intaking what is bad.

And remove what is dangerous. So, for example, Halloween is coming up. My children will probably, likely collect a lot of junk.

[4 : 52] And we're not that mean. We're going to let them eat some junk. We'll let them eat some candy. But only a little. They don't get to have candy for dinner. Okay? They get to have a piece

here, a piece there.

It'll probably last us a few years that way. We try to avoid overindulging on empty calories. Eat what is good for you and avoid what is bad.

And likewise, we know that if something is in you, in your body, that is dangerous to you, it needs to come out. It needs to be removed. We visited my grandmother last week.

We loaded up the van once again and made the trip down to Athens, Georgia, where she lives, to go celebrate her 90th birthday party. And we got there before the rest of the crowd got there.

And so we got to sit and to talk with her. And I got to ask her about her health. And my grandmother has cancer. She's 90 years old. And she's been undergoing treatments for several years.

[5 : 53] And so just recently, the doctors found a spot on her skin. It's something new that developed. They took a look at it under the microscope and found out, sure enough, it was melanoma.

It's dangerous. It's cancerous. It's aggressive. It's destructive to the health of her body. And so like any good doctor would do, he put forward a process, a plan of action, something to take care of the issue.

He said, we're going to examine the problem. We're going to identify it. And then we're going to cut it out. And we're going to monitor it. We're going to make sure that it heals as it should.

We're going to make sure it hasn't spread any further. No good doctor would ever look at that spot and say, you know what? Let's leave it. See what it does.

Let it remain. No doctor, knowing how destructive that cancer is, would let it be. Just hope it goes away. For the good of the body, it must be removed.

[7 : 03] Well, we're coming to the end of the book of Titus. And throughout this letter, Paul could be described as a health nut.

He is obsessed with the health, not of his body, but of the body of Christ, with the health of the church. His concern has been throughout the letter with the soundness or the health of the body. The church is the body of Christ. We are members of one another. The local church makes that invisible body visible. And churches, just like physical bodies, we can be healthy or we can be sickly.

We can intake what is good and what's healthy and nutritious and beneficial and we can grow strong or we can feast on empty calories. We can have candy for dinner and grow weak.

And even in healthy churches, from time to time, issues can crop up that are dangerous for the health of the body.

[8 : 11] And so like a good doctor, Paul tells Titus, we're going to have to do something here, Titus. We're going to have to remove something here, Titus. Don't leave it unaddressed.

Don't let it spread. Do everything you can to remedy this situation. And if you cannot remedy the situation, it must be removed. So Paul here, he gives us two keys to protecting the health of the body.

Two keys to protecting the health of the body. This is going to be our outline this morning. If you'd like to take notes, two keys to protecting the health of the body.

Avoid foolish controversy and remove divisive people. The two parts that we see here in Titus 3, 9 through 11.

Number one, avoid foolish controversy. And number two, remove divisive people. First, he says one key to protecting the health of the body is to avoid foolish controversy.

[9 : 19] Look here to verse 9 with me. Eyes on verse 9, please. He says, but avoid foolish controversies. Proversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law.

For they are unprofitable and worthless. So avoid them. Don't pay them any mind. Paul says to Titus, stop entertaining. Stop listening to.

Stop arguing over. Stop focusing on. Stop obsessing over little things. Not everything is worth the time. Stay the course. In fact, that word avoid here, it literally means turn your face.

In the other direction. Pay it no mind. Do not give it the time of day. It's not exactly clear what the issue was specifically that Titus was dealing with here.

That has Paul all riled up here in the book of Titus. But it seems to be tied to some obscure interpretation and application of the law.

[10 : 20] And so Paul, he calls them in chapter 1. He says these are Jewish myths. And here, he says that these are discussions of genealogies. They're questions about the law.

It's likely similar to what Timothy was dealing with in Ephesus. If you make note of 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 3 through 4. Paul says to Timothy there, he says, Remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

Sound familiar? Which promote speculations rather than stewardship from God that is by faith. And again, in 2 Timothy chapter 2, he says, Avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.

That's the unprofitability that he's talking about. It's unprofitable and worthless. It's not producing the fruit of godliness that Paul wants to see from sound doctrine. And then here is a good reminder for Christians about to get on social media.

Okay? He says, Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they breed quarrels. So we may not know exactly what teaching was going on here specifically, but we do know how Paul feels about it.

[11:47] Right? They are unprofitable. They are worthless. They're not worth discussing. Avoid it. Turn your face the other direction.

Now, I wonder if you have the same question that I do when I read this. What's interesting to me is that these were not discussions about some outside source.

Okay? This was not some obscure teacher with his own writings that was distracting the church.

No. What does it say? These were discussions about the law.

The word of God. And I thought, Paul, that all scripture was God-breathed and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training in righteousness.

All scripture is useful. So how can you now say that these discussions about the law, the word of God, are useless, worthless, unprofitable?

[12:49] What's going on here? Shouldn't this matter to you, Paul? I'm glad you asked. I think what he's saying here is we need to major on the majors and minor on the minors.

We need to major on the majors and minor on the minors. All scripture is God-breathed. All scripture is useful. But not everything in the Bible carries equal weight.

Did I just say that? Yes, I did. Let me say it again. All scripture is useful. But not everything in the Bible carries equal weight.

Does it not matter more whether Christ was born of a virgin than what colors were on Joseph's robe and what they may or may not represent? Does it not matter more that Christ actually died for our sin in our place?

That he physically, actually rose up from the grave to conquer death? Then what type of fruit did Adam or Eve eat? Was it an apple or was it a pomegranate? Was it a big fish?

[14:02] Was it a whale that swallowed up Jonah? What type of furniture did Jesus make in his carpentry shop? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Was Goliath seven feet tall or nine feet tall or eleven feet tall?

Do you get my picture? The issue here, it wasn't theological curiosity. I want to be clear. We should be curious about God's word.

We should investigate it. Ask questions of it. I went to seminary. I wrote a paper on genealogies. Comparing the genealogies of Christ.

Paul is not against theological curiosity. But not everything is of equal importance. Be curious.

Ask questions. Seek answers. But church, do not get distracted. Do not get distracted.

[14:59] Eat a little bit of candy, but do not eat it for dinner. Feast on what's good. Feast on what's nutritious for you. All doctrine, properly weighed, properly studied, should lead to devotion.

But wrongly weighed, wrongly applied, leads to distraction. And at worst, leads to division.

Everything in scripture is worthy of our devotion. It's worthy of our discussion, but not equally worthy of obsession. And not everything is worthy of division.

The early church had a saying. They used to say, in essentials, unity. In non-essentials, diversity. In all things, charity.

I think we'd be wise to recover that sort of sentiment in Christianity today. In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, diversity.

[16:02] In all things, charity. We have to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Be convinced. Be convinced. But do not enter foolish controversy over the minors.

Major on the majors. And be convinced. But do not create unnecessary division and tension over the minors. Not every issue is worth fighting over. And not every hill is worth dying on. Not every theological difference between you and another brother and sister in Christ makes them a heretic or a false teacher. You know, I just, I grieve over the ways that I hear some Christians speaking about other Christians that just don't belong to their camp. And so they must be the enemy. They must be wrong. They must be heretical. Must be false teacher. Just because we divide or disagree on minor issues. Not every hill is a hill to die on, church. There's always room for charity in all things. We harm the body when we treat every issue with equal weight. [17:10] And when we're quick to enter into foolish controversy. So, how do we rightly weigh the scriptures? That's the question, right?

How do we rightly weigh the scriptures? Well, you may be familiar with a concept called theological triage. Theological triage.

I believe Al Mohler was the first to actually coin that term. And I'll paraphrase here from an article that he wrote in 2005. He takes that from the medical world.

So, maybe you're not familiar with theological triage. You're probably familiar with triage. Medical triage. And he says, And so, they have to sort these issues out.

They've got to figure out which is most important. So, that they can treat them with the proper treatment. And so, what they do is they use a color-coded system of tags. Colored tags.

[18:24] Black tag. That's bad news. That's untreatable. The person is either dead or they're in such a condition that it can't be treated. It's incurable, untreatable. Red tag is the most urgent.

There's a chance. It's life-threatening. There's a chance that with the right treatment quickly applied, we can bring this person back to life. Yellow tag. They're in stable condition. Not likely to die.

They still need serious treatment. On and on and on. So, he gets a white tag, which means they're just people that wanted to pay for an ambulance ride for some reason. Not sure why they're there.

And so, Mohler and others, I'd recommend a guy named Gavin Ortland to you.

They take that idea of medical triage and apply it to the Bible. And to our conversations about the Word. I think it's a helpful way for us to think about it.

So, first-tier issues. First-tier issues. These are issues of the most importance. Highest importance.

[19:26] The Trinity. The divinity of Christ. Salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. These are worth dying for.

You cannot be a Christian if you don't hold to these beliefs. The resurrection of Christ. The second coming of Christ. These are of utmost first-tier importance.

Then you have second-tier issues. Baptism, for example. Is it important? Yes. Does the Bible speak to it?

Yes. Friend, you ought to be convinced about your position on baptism. The Bible speaks on it. We believe we're a Baptist church. We believe baptism is for believers.

Our Presbyterian brothers and sisters believe that baptism is for believers and their children. We take a difference of interpretation here, but they are not heretics.

[20:22] They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. So, we divide into separate churches. But we, as Mark Dever says, we build low fences and we shake hands often. They're our friends.

We don't divide over such things. We disagree in love. And then you have third-tier issues. Down here at the bottom. Now, these are issues that we can be a part of the same church family and we can disagree.

We don't have to argue. We don't have to divide. We don't have to throw stones at one another. We can be a part of one big happy family and take positions that are different.

Maybe Scripture speaks to it, but it's a little less clear. It's a little less easily discerned. The details surrounding the second coming of Christ, for example. We've been studying Revelation.

Is He coming? First tier. Yes, you better believe it. Will He judge the living and the dead? You better believe it. First tier. He's coming. Will the new heavens and the new earth be glorious when He comes to reign?

[21:26] Yes, first tier. You better believe it. When and how and where and what will be the signs when He comes? And how do we interpret literal millennium, figurative millennium? How do we understand Revelation?

We can disagree here. And that's okay. And essentials unity and non-essentials diversity and all things charity.

And way down the list here, way down the list, are the issues that Titus is dealing with here in Crete. Arguments over genealogies?

Are you kidding me? A list of names? We're going to divide over that? These names that promote speculation rather than stewardship? We're going to spend our time obsessing over that?

See, the problem here was an over-fascination with minor points of the law in a way that distracted them and everyone around them from the main point of the law, the main point of the Bible, namely the glory of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 38] That demands our full devotion. That is what demands our full attention. Isn't that what Paul has just said in chapter 3, verses 3 through 8?

This is what we saw last week. The gospel. Make a big deal of the gospel church. Make a big deal of our sinful past. Look here. Chapter 3, verses 3 through 8.

He says, We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others, hating one another.

We're no better than anyone else. We're no more worthy of salvation than anyone else. Make a big deal of our need for redemption. And then make a big deal of God's saving grace in the gospel.

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior, appeared, He saved us. He saved us. He saved us.

[23 : 36] His work, His power, His mercy, His plan, His steadfast love. He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His great mercy.

Make a big deal of His mercy, church. Make a big deal of regeneration, our new life in Christ, new birth. You've been born again.

Do you want to talk about that? Do you want to make a big deal about that? You've been reborn by the power of His Holy Spirit, the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

Call attention to that. Rejoice in that. Make a big deal of Jesus, Christ our Savior. We worship a risen King.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God, slain for us, risen from the grave, coming again to judge the world. Isn't that worthy of our minds?

[24 : 35] Isn't that worthy of our discussion? Isn't that worthy of our emphasis as we gather, as we discuss, as we study?

Isn't that worthy of our lives? Is that of first-tier importance for you as you study the Word?

As you talk with other believers? Is that what comes through as the emphasis of your life? Make much of our status in Him, church.

Justified. Forgiven. Declared innocent in the sight of God. Anyone who trusts in Christ. Anyone. Your long record of sin that spills over the judge's table, out the front door of the courtroom, is nailed to the cross.

You are declared righteous. You are forgiven and received and adopted as a son or a daughter of the King. Is that not worthy of our attention? The hope that we have of eternal life free from sin forever with God.

[25 : 46] Eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth. Is that not worthy of our attention? Don't get distracted. And don't divide over worthless things.

A healthy church feasts on the good news of the gospel. Amen? Amen? That's why he says in verse 8, I want you, Titus, to insist on these things.

Insist on these things, church. Don't get distracted. These things are excellent and profitable for people. These things are what leads to godliness in the church.

But avoid all this other foolish talk. Unprofitable. Worthless. But sadly, even in a healthy church, issues can crop up from time to time that are dangerous for the health of the body.

Everything is going well and then one day, cancer. Dangerous. Destructive. So Paul says, we must be ready to remove it.

[27 : 09] Avoid foolish controversy and second, remove divisive people. This is admittedly much harder to swallow.

It's one thing to talk about ideas. Avoid foolish conversations, ideas, topics. It's another thing entirely to do what Paul says here in verses 10 and 11.

For the sake of the health of the body, avoid foolish controversies and remove divisive people. Look there to verse 10 and 11 with me.

He says, as for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him.

Knowing that such a person is warped and sinful, he is self-condemned. Remove divisive people. This is not a small matter.

[28 : 16] And we should grieve to think about the potential of removing someone from our body. But Paul is clear here that if there is unrepentant divisiveness, unrepentant, let me say it again, unrepentant divisiveness, after many heartfelt attempts to bring them back, call them to repentance, draw them back to seek reconciliation, if they are persistent in their attempt to divide the church, Paul says they prove themselves to be warped and sinful.

And they must be removed for the health of the body. I pray we never have to apply this scripture here.

But the time may come. In my years of ministry, I've seen this happen once, where I sat in a room with other elders and deacons and ministry leaders and read this passage to an individual who had been stirring division in the church.

Pleas for repentance had been made and made and made and made over the course of weeks and months of warning and calling to repentance.

And I remember very clearly calling him to stop spreading division, opening this passage to him and calling him to stop spreading lies. And he said with hate in his voice, this will get worse.

[30 : 07] And he was right. I was thankful that this passage had been taught and understood by the church well before it needed to be applied.

That they got it. So I want to ask four questions here. We're going to jump around to a few different places of scripture, so please have your Bibles open.

I want to ask four questions here that I think will help us understand what's going on and what he's saying here. First question, what gift was given to the church in the gospel?

What gift was given to the church in the gospel? There are many gifts given to the church in the gospel, but the one that was under attack here in Crete is the gift of unity.

The gift of unity. Ephesians chapter 4 verses 1 through 3. Paul says, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[31 : 31] In the gospel, Christ Jesus, he created spiritual unity. The sinners who were once divided from God are now united through faith in Christ, reunited to the Heavenly Father, and sinners who were once divided from one another are now through Christ in one body united to one another.

Now, we don't create spiritual unity. We don't have the task to create unity in the church. We're given the task to maintain what we have been given in the gospel.

Now, Paul says, be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We have to be reminded of this. Now, Paul has to tell us to do this because otherwise we slip into our own opinions, our own preferences, our own world.

We want everybody to bend to our will and our way, get on board with us, and our desires is about us. And so, Paul tells us, he calls us in the power of the Spirit to bear with one another in love, with humility, with patience, with gentleness.

Be eager to maintain the unity. Are we pursuing it? Church, are we eager to maintain the unity?

[32 : 57] Not do we want a unified church? Everybody wants a unified church. Uh-oh. Better speak right. Everybody wants a unified church. Are we pursuing it with eagerness?

Are we praying for it, laying our preferences aside for the sake of unity? Keeping these first-tier issues at first importance for the sake of unity.

We're probably not united in many things. Musical preferences, background, income level, upbringing, hair color. But we're united in the gospel.

Keep that first. Second question. What authority was given to the church? what authority was given to the church?

In short, the church is given authority to recognize that unity. The church is given authority to recognize that spiritual unity.

[33 : 58] Matthew chapter 18. If you would turn there for me, because I want you to lay eyes on this passage. This is the passage that Pete read for us earlier. Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 through 20.

Jesus says, if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. Don't hold a grudge. Don't keep your offense silent.

Don't harbor it inside of yourself. Talk to your brother between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you've gained your brother. Praise God. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.

If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. Here's the authority. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. Whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

[35 : 22] For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them. you see the church is a community of the redeemed.

We have been by the grace of God plucked out of belonging to the world. We now belong to the kingdom of God and the church is given incredible authority by God to recognize and to declare in the name of Christ who's in and who's out.

that's what church membership is. It's a recognition by the church that each individual member is a member of the invisible church, is a member of the kingdom of God, that they are in fact saved by the grace of God.

They have a credible profession of saving faith in Christ Jesus and so when the church adds a new member, what we're saying is we affirm your salvation.

We believe as far as we can tell, we're not infallible, but as far as we can tell that you have been genuinely born again. We believe you are united to God and we are committing to walk alongside you.

[36 : 44] We're committing to help you live a life that is pleasing to God, honoring to Him, to disciple you and to serve you and to love you as a brother or sister in Christ.

You are united to us. And when a church removes a member from among them, what they're saying is we can no longer in good conscience affirm your salvation.

We can't say you're saved or not saved. We're not infallible. God alone knows that, but something is happening here. There's sufficient evidence, this posture of unrepentive divisiveness, of wanting to work against, destroy the church, that's not consistent with a profession of faith.

And so, we release you back into the world. Church membership does not save anyone. Church discipline does not condemn anyone.

Rather, the church, again, is given authority to recognize on behalf of Christ and to declare those who give evidence of regeneration or evidence not of us condemning, but of self-condemnation.

[38 : 02] So, third, what command was given for the divisive person? What command was given for the divisive person?

First, is to seek reconciliation. First command is to seek restoration. The removal is not punitive, it is with tears, it is patient, it is slow, painful, it is painful.

You know, this passage in Matthew 18, if your Bibles are still open there to Matthew 18, he says, if your brother sins against you, tell him, go bring others, bring the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

That passage is sandwiched there in between two parables. Do you see that there, Matthew 18?

Two parables, parable of the lost sheep, we won't read them for the sake of time, and the parable of the unforgiving servant.

Two slices of bread right there, the meat in the middle, this section on church discipline in Matthew chapter 18. The parable of the lost sheep, you know it, it says there was a shepherd had a hundred sheep, he kept ninety-nine, the one went off, and what happens?

[39 : 24] He stays with the ninety-nine and bid good riddance? No, he pursues the one that went away. And it concludes here with the heart of God, it says, so it is not the will of my father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

And then the parable of the unforgiving servant, there beneath it begins with Peter's question, Lord, how often will my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Seven times?

the Lord said to him, not seven Peter, but seventy-seven. I think this should tell us, church, that the removal of a member from among us should never be because of our unwillingness to forgive. It should never be because of the church's hardened posture. the first command in any case of church discipline is to seek reconciliation.

It's to seek to demonstrate the heart of God to sinners, to call them to repent, to open up your arms, to be willing to forgive, not seven, but 77 times if they would but repent.

[40 : 41] But if they will not, if this is not possible, then with tears, with tears, they must be removed.

Surgery is painful. I've never met anybody who enjoyed it. But sometimes for the sake of the health of the body, it is necessary.

So Paul says, have nothing more to do with him. If that sounds weighty, if that sounds serious to you, it is. And this is not a popular section of scripture.

And for good reason, this isn't pleasant, but sadly, it is on sad occasion necessary. When someone has so hardened themselves in sin, this warped and self-condemning state that will not accept reconciliation, we don't condemn them, we recognize that they are self- condemned.

Isn't that judging? Maybe you're wondering that. It is. As we were commanded to do.

[42 : 00] 1 Corinthians chapter 5, Paul says, I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother. Let me say that again. who bears the name of brother.

If he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one, for what have I to do with judging outsiders?

Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

Fourth question. what is the goal of removal? What's the point? Couldn't we just leave it alone?

Well, there are many goals. Obedience for one, as I hope we've seen, this clear command of scripture, our witness for another. What does the outside world say when we let a divisiveness, a spirit of division exist in the church?

[43 : 09] a warning for other believers, the purity of the church, the glory of God, but another goal of removal, I want us to see this, is love.

It's love. Our hope and our prayer in removing anyone is that by the grace of God, they be awakened to the depth of their sin, that they see it for what it is, and that they be restored in full, both to the Lord and to the church.

The first Corinthians 5, again, he says, when you are assembled, church, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and my spirit is present with the power of the Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.

He says, send him out of the church and into the world. Treat him, as Matthew 18 says, as a Gentile or a tax collector. But look here, here's the goal, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

The goal is salvation, is redemption, is restored unity. So church, we close here with hope.

[44 : 31] This is the hope of the gospel. No sinner is too far gone. No sinner is too far gone.

So long as there is breath in our lungs, there is opportunity, there is invitation to repent of our sin, to cast ourselves and to trust in Christ, there is hope for the worst, most hardened, most difficult, most divisive, most ruined sinner in the world.

Like the prodigal son, if they would only recognize their state and come back home, they would with open arms be received by their father. Paul knew this, didn't he?

Murderer of the church, persecutor of Christ, the chief of sinners, rescued from his sin by the grace of God, restored to fellowship with Christ and his people, the church.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost, but I received mercy for this reason, Paul says, that in me as the foremost sinner, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

[46 : 10] Do you believe that gospel? Rejoice that your sins have been forgiven. Rejoice that you as an undeserving sinner have been reconciled to God by the blood of Christ and rejoice that by grace through faith you have been brought into one big, messy, happy family called the church.

Do you love that mess? Do you love the church? God does. Those who came through last week's membership class, they read through our church covenant line by line, that's a list of our

commitments that we plan to make to one another and the very first one on the list, you know what it is?

We will pursue unity, working and praying for the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace, working and praying for the unity.

Are you? Are you committed to pursue unity? Would you commit now not to make mountains out of mole hills here?

Church, would you commit now to not divide over little things, to not fight or fuss over minor things, to not obsess over minor things? Would you commit now to make Christ in the glory of God the center of our attention together as a church?

[47 : 44] Would you just commit to do that? Would you make that the priority of your heart as an individual as you soak in the word of God this week?

Would you seek the main things? devote your life to Christ in the gospel? And would we commit as a church family to obey the word of God?

There's parts that are easy, there's maybe a few of those, and those that are harder to swallow.

Would we submit ourselves to his word for the sake of his glory and the good of the church?

Our great physician heals the sick, church, and the body of Christ, despite our flaws, despite our weakness, will one day be radiant.

Let's pursue that with eagerness. Amen? Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your word, and we pray that what was good and true and helpful of any that I just said would stick and if there was any untruth, anything unhelpful, would it fall out of our ears and hit the ground and be forgotten?

[49 : 05] Lord, we ask that you would be made much of here among us. Lord, we ask that we would be a unified body, unified in the gospel of Christ.

Keep that at the center of our hearts and of our lives. We love you. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Absolutely.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.