

I Am A Church Member Book Study

~Chapter 2: I Will Be a Unifying Church Member

Discussion for Church Members, Small Groups, Ministry Teams and Bible Studies at HPC.

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Jesus said in John 13:34-35 “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

~The world will know if we are Christians or not by the way those who are believers act toward one another. When you become a Christian, God expects you to be a part of His church. But when you become a part of His church, He wants you to be a unifying presence there.

That Thing Called Unity

~Michael Jordan: “Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence wins championships.” Sports teams with average talent can win championships. It doesn’t matter how many superstars you have on the team if they can’t play together as a team.

Unity is important. It is critical. William Barclay said, “The gospel cannot truly be preached in any congregation which is not one united band of brothers.”

~When church members don’t work well together, the church is weaker as a whole. Jesus says Mark 3:24-25 – “If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand.” Unity is vital to the health of a church. One of the meanings of vital is absolutely necessary or essential. You can’t get along without it.

Eph. 4:1-3 – 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.

Paul says, “I urge you” to do something. What is that? To live a life worthy of the calling you have received. The word “live” literally means “as you walk around.” “Worthy” points to behavior that is suitable to the calling received. How do we behave in a way that is suitable or worthy of our calling? Paul gives us five ways that we’re to do that.

Phil 2:1-8 – 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, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. 3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above

yourselves, 4 not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. 5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! We're to be humble.

~What is Christ-like love? Paul uses the same term here – agape – that he uses in 1 Cor. 13:4-8a – "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 8 Love never fails."

Every church member must contribute to the unity of the church. You have a responsibility as a church member. You are to be a source of unity. Never be a divisive force. You are to love your fellow church members unconditionally. That doesn't mean that you agree with everyone all the time. It does mean that you are willing to sacrifice your own preferences to keep unity in the church. When we seek unity, we demonstrate love. Col. 3:14 – And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Unity is really important in our church. Are you doing your part?

Gossip and Other Negative Talk

~Gossip is bad. Gossip is destructive to our church. Few things can destroy the unity of a church like gossip. Gossip is when we talk about people behind their backs. We pass along tales that might or might not be true. The goal of gossip is to damage someone's reputation. It seeks to do harm to the person being gossiped about.

~Our author gives us two important ways to handle gossip. Number one, don't be a source of gossip. If you have any doubt whether something is gossip or not, don't mention it. Keep your tongue under control. Eph. 4:29 – Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

~*Number two is if someone begins to share gossip, do not allow the conversation to continue. Kindly say that you would rather not hear any gossip and you hope it wouldn't continue to spread.* And if there are a few more members like you, word will begin to travel. Other church members will know that gossip is not tolerated. The congregation will be a place of joy and unity. The best way to defeat gossip is not to listen to it. Prov. 20:19 – A gossip betrays a confidence; so avoid anyone who talks too much.

~Another destructive element is constant criticism. Some people are just never satisfied. Something is always wrong. These are known as hypercritical people. They're excessive in their disapproval of people and programs. They condemn and complain all the time.

Phil. 4:8 – Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

~Gossip and overly critical statements come from the evil within our hearts. Lk.

6:45 – A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Forgiveness and Unity

~Unity will not happen if the members have unforgiving hearts. Too many times, members have anger and hurt because of something another member has said or done. Some members are angry and hurt over something that a leader has said or did or failed to do.

Col. 3:12-13 – Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Jesus tells a parable about forgiveness in Matt. 18:21-35 – Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. [Some translations have 70x7]

[Here is Jesus’ answer to Peter’s question] 23 Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold [10,000 talents] was brought to him. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. 26 At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.”

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. [100 denarii] He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded. 29 His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’ 30 But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

31 “When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. 32 Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

[Then Jesus makes this application of the parable] 35 This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

There are three important principles about forgiveness in that parable:

1. The first principle is that true forgiveness goes beyond any reasonable human limits. I've got hard enough time forgiving someone seven times. By then, I'm exasperated with that person and ready to be finished with them altogether. Jesus is saying, "Don't keep score!" He's telling us that we can't place limits on forgiveness.

2. The second important principle is that we have to remember just how much God has forgiven us. How much did this servant owe the king? 10,000 talents. One talent was approximately 6,000 denarii. A denarius was a day's wage. 10,000 talents would therefore be the equivalent of 16.5 years' wages for 10,000 men. We could say that the servant represents you and me. The king represents God. And when we realize just how completely God has forgiven all of our sins, it ought to produce an attitude of forgiveness toward other people.

3. The last important principle is that we should forgive others as completely and lavishly as God has forgiven us. What happened with this forgiven servant? He went and chased down another of the king's servants who owed him (the already forgiven servant) what would amount to a paltry sum when compared to the debt the king forgave. When his fellow servant asked for mercy, the servant that had been forgiven by the king had him thrown in jail. However, other servants of the king saw what happened and they immediately went to the king to tell him about it. The king was extremely angry at the first servant and sent him to prison after all. The king said, "Shouldn't you treat other people the way that I treated you?" ~Here's what Jesus wants us to learn. If you want to be forgiven by God, you have to forgive others. Matt. 6:14-15 – "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

~Each local church is made up of imperfect members and imperfect leaders. Church unity is torn apart when members refuse to forgive. Christ loved us so much that he died on a cross to forgive us. And now, as he has forgiven us, so we must forgive others.

Second pledge:

I will seek to be a source of unity for the sake of the gospel. I will create unity by serving others remembering that Christ served me by going to the cross. It is not about my preferences and desires. I know there are no perfect leaders, staff, or church members. I will not be a source of negative talk instead I will forgive those who hurt me. My church is about more than me.

David Levite pointed out to me that we should consider the title of the book we're studying together as a question: Am I a church member? Good question. When you submit to Jesus Christ as Lord and receive his grace so that he becomes your Savior, you become part of the church – the body of Christ on earth.

Are you a church member?