

SERMON NOTES - Complicated Unity

1. UNITY IS IMPORTANT:

Jhn 17:20-23 NKJV - "20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. 22 "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me."

2. UNITY IS COMPLICATED (MULTIFACETED)

Eph 3:10 NKJV - "10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places,"

- What should I break fellowship over, and what is OK to disagree on?
- Why are there so many Churches? Can't we all just get along and be together?
- How do I choose a Church or when should I leave a Church?

These questions result from us as modern believers having an incorrect understanding of, or emphasis on unity in 3 main areas: **beliefs**, **people** and **mission**. We treat Church like a shop we visit as opposed to a family run business we are a part of.

Unity is key and it comes from correct understanding of its complicated, multifaceted nature.

The Corinthian Church had similar problems to ours. They were divided and at odds with each other over 3 main issues, but underlying these issues was an attitude that was similar to our modern attitudes; Selfishness (me first), and a failure to understand what beliefs are the most important. Let's look at them to learn the lessons in these 3 areas:

People: Not causing schisms based on personalities, yet having functioning, healthy groups.

Beliefs: the essentials, the disputables, the spectrum and how to handle these in a modern context.

Mission: What is our motivation and end goal? Is it comfort, happiness, a sense of wellbeing? OR is it, as it should be, the great commission, and unity?

2.1. LEADERS

1Co 1:10-11 NKJV - "10 Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions(*schisma*) among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind ("*nous*" "*understanding*") and in the same judgement ("*gnōmē*" "*opinion*"). 11 For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions (*strife*) among you.

1Co 1:12-13 NKJV - "12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of **Paul**," or "I am of **Apollos**," or "I am of **Cephas**," or "I am of **Christ**." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptised in the name of Paul?"

1Co 3:4-9, 21-23 NKJV - "4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? 5 Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. 7 So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. 8 Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour. 9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building. ... 21 Therefore let no one boast in men. For all things are yours: 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

1Co 4:3-6 NKJV - "3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know of nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other."

2.1.1 The Correct Attitude = Teams Of Fellow Workers, Well Led, But Also With Love And Respect For Other Teams

1Co 16:10-12 NKJV - "10 And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also do. 11 Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. 12 Now concerning our brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time."

Tit 3:13 NKJV - "13 Send Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey with haste, that they may lack nothing."

Phi 1:15-18 NKJV - "15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: 16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defence of the gospel. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice."

What were Churches like in the New Testament?

Revelation 2 & 3 - There were 7 autonomous Churches (lampstands) within a small geographical area. Each had its own leadership, and different messages and missions from Christ, yet they were in unity with each other. Even within these 7, Laodicea was extremely close to 2 other Churches (not included in the 7 lampstands) - Colossae and Hierapolis - and yet these weren't included, probably because they didn't have a close relationship with John. (see Col 4:13-16).

Paul's fellow workers are listed in Col 4:7-15, Rom 16:1-21, Phil 2:19-30, Phil 4:2-3, Phm 1:1, 24, 1 Cor 16:10-19.

But Paul was not an Apostle to every Church - they did not all accept or request the input of his gifting:

1Co 9:2 NKJV - "2 If I am not an apostle to others, yet doubtless I am to you. For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord."

Acts 19:9-20 - Churches were of enormous size (at least 50,000 Christians in Ephesus - Ac 19:19), Signs and wonders, Paul empowers them to go out and do mission, they met in homes (1 Cor 16:19).

1.2 Application For Us

We must have a Church and be in a team, but not compete. Relatives (cousins) rather than opponents. Honour, love, speaking well, and prioritising unity, while still working in functional teams. Churches were large, and diverse, and there were many teams within the larger Church, yet they were urged to honour and respect each other and not to be divided over personalities.

1Co 11:19 NKJV — "For there must also be factions ("*airesis*" - "*sects*") among you, that those who are approved ("*dokimos*" "*tested, proven*") may be recognized among you."

2.2. BELIEFS & CONVICTIONS

Beliefs in that day that caused differences:

- Meat sacrificed to idols was a big issue
- Special days and festivals, especially with some Jewish believers feeling the need to keep some Old Testament days, feasts and rituals.

These were not rebellious or self-righteous acts. The believers were trying their best to sincerely love and worship God, and to obey their conscience, and yet there were genuine differences.

Rom 14:1-6, 10, 13-15, 18-21, 23 NKJV - "1 Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful ("*disputable*" NIV, "*opinions*" ESV) things. 2 For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats only vegetables. 3 Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. 4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be

made to stand, for God is able to make him stand. 5 One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. 6 He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. ... 10 But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Christ. ... 13 Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way. 14 I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. 15 Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died. ... 18 For he who serves Christ in these things is acceptable to God and approved by men. 19 Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. 20 Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are pure, but it is evil for the man who eats with offence. 21 It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak. ... 23 But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin."

1Co 8:1-13 NKJV - "1 Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. 2 And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. 3 But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. 4 Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live. 7 However, there is not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat it as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. 8 But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. 9 But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. 10 For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? 11 And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? 12 But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. 13 Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble."

1Co 10:19-21, 23-33 NKJV - "19 What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? 20 Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons. ... 23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. 25 Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; 26 for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." 27 If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. 28 But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." 29 "Conscience," I say, not your own, but that of the other. For why is my liberty judged by another man's conscience? 30 But if I partake with thanks, why am I evil spoken of for the food over which I give thanks? 31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES?

1Co 15:3-4 NIV - "3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures**, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,"

1. The reality of Jesus, who He was, and what He did for us
2. Salvation by Grace alone through Faith alone
3. The importance and reliability of Scripture

WHAT ARE SOME MODERN EQUIVALENTS FOR “DISPUTABLE” BELIEFS?

These are issues where there is a genuine and sincere desire to follow and obey God and His word, but people’s conscience leads them to a slightly different interpretation. It is not about rebellion or sin. We should be true to our own beliefs and convictions and find teams and congregations that agree on these matters, while making every effort to be gentle and to foster unity with those who agree on the key beliefs, worship elsewhere to us, and believe differently:

Baptisms	End time theology
Holy Spirit Gifts	Alcohol usage
Church structure/leadership/ titles	Dress & make-up
Liturgies/worship styles	Movies, music, entertainment etc
Sabbaths, Feast days, & other Old Testament rules (Gal 5:1-5)	

Some matters that may be equivalent to “participating in Idol worship” (1 Cor 10:19-21)
1Co 10:21 NKJV - "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons."

These may include:

- Eastern Religion in medicine, exercise, art etc
- Religious items and artefacts in the home
- Occult practices - mediums, fortune tellers
- Participation in worship of other religions

There may also be several other matters where people call themselves Christian, but are willfully ignoring or disregarding Scripture, or bending and disrespecting Scripture, and this may then become an “indisputable”, or first order, matter.

2.3. MISSION / MOTIVATION / END GOAL - MISSION + LOVE

The last matter where unity is important, and which can cause division, is our motivation, goal, or mission. If it is selfishness, or self satisfaction, it may lead to problems. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their selfishness, and showed them how to have the correct aims and goals: namely the Great Commission, and Unity/love:

1Co 11:18-21, 33 NKJV — "18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. **19** For there must also be factions (“*airesis*” - “*sects*”) among you, that those who are approved (“*dokimos*” “*tested, proven*”) may be recognized among you."20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

1Co 9:19-27 NKJV - "19 For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; 20 and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; 21 to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; 22 to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. 23 Now this I do for the gospel's sake, that I may be partaker of it with you. 24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that

you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."

OTHER VERSES

2Ti 3:16-17 NIV - "16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

MEAT IDOLS, SPECIAL DAYS & CIRCUMCISION

Gal 4:9-11 NKJV - "9 But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years. 11 I am afraid for you, lest I have laboured for you in vain."

Gal 5:1, 4 NKJV - "1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage. ... 4 You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace."

Col 2:16-23 NKJV - "16 So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, 17 which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. 20 Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations-- 21 "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle," 22 which all concern things which perish with the using--according to the commandments and doctrines of men? 23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh."

Act 16:1-3 NKJV - "1 Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. 2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek."

Small group discussion guidelines

Remember that the aim of the small group is to foster discussion and community, rather than for the leader or one individual to preach to everyone.

1 - Often an **Icebreaker question** is a great way to start discussion. You could ask a question like:

- What were the highs or lows of your week?
- What is your earliest memory?
- If you had to describe yourself as one animal, what would it be and why?
- What is your favourite type of holiday destination?

2 - Next, **read the passage**. You can ask various people in the group to help by each reading a portion of the passage.

3 - These are the **main questions** to ask to understand the passage:

- What is the main message of this talk / passage?
Allow discussion and even diverging from the main topic if it is helpful.
- What did you find particularly helpful or challenging?
- What did you not fully understand?
- What can we do **PRACTICALLY** in response to this teaching?

4 - Close by offering **prayer** for each person.

- Ask, "how can we pray for you / each other now?"
- Ask each person to pray or you, as leader, pray for each person's need

The blessing and opportunity in Small Groups is the possibility for...

- Each person to contribute and/or ask questions,
- People to pray for each other and to ask for prayer,
- People to learn to use and grow in their gifts,
- Community, friendship and intimacy in relationships.

God Bless you in this very important ministry.