

# Helping and Hindering Unity

Week 34: Aug 20-26 – *Romans 13-16; Acts 20*

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## Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys (p.59)

## Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

As we closed Paul's letter to the Romans and returned to his travels in the book of *Acts*, we were reminded of the importance of unity in the church.

"Let us behave properly as in the day... not in strife and jealousy." *Romans 13:13*

"For the kingdom of God... is righteousness and peace in the Spirit." *14:17*

"Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." *14:19*

"Each of you is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." *15:2*

"Now may God grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify God..." *15:5, 6*

So then, let's investigate the topic of unity. What is it? Why is it important, and what can we do to help or hinder unity in the church?

- What Is Unity?

**UNITY:** The state of being one; agreement, harmony; oneness of sentiment, affection, or behavior; combining (diverse) parts into one. Unity is not the same as uniformity.

**UNIFORMITY:** Unvaried sameness, conformity to a pattern or rule; the absence of diversity

Unity is a choice, while uniformity is coerced. We consent to unity, but we comply with uniformity. Unity is self-imposed, while uniformity is imposed by others. Unity is internal, while uniformity is external.

*Psalms 133:1*, "How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity."

- Why Is Unity Important?

Unity was important to Jesus. Therefore, it should be important to us. One of Jesus' last prayers was that His followers would be one (*John 17:11, 21-23*). Unity in the church reflects the unity of the trinity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Unity in the church demonstrates to the world the effectual presence and power of Christ in the lives of believers. Though we are diverse, we are a body, a body that finds its unity in the head, which is Christ. We have been reconciled to God and to each other. Christ is our common bond. In Him, we have unity.

- How Can We Help Foster Unity in the Church?

“Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.” *14:19*

The best way we can encourage unity is to grow spiritually. The more we grow in the likeness of Christ, the more we will pursue the things that are important to Him (i.e., unity). Here are a few of the ways that Paul suggested we can promote unity in the church.

1. **Love** (*Rom. 13:8-10*): Paul reminded us of Jesus’ words, “to love our neighbors as ourselves,” and then Paul wrote, “Love does no wrong to a neighbor.” Much of our ability to pursue or promote unity depends on how we view ourselves and others. God commanded us to love others as we do ourselves (*Col. 3:12-15*). Selflessness helps unity, while selfishness hinders it.
  2. **Behave Properly** (*Rom. 13:12-14; 14:15*): We encourage unity by our character and conduct. “Putting on the Lord Jesus” and “making no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts” reduces conflict in the church. Good behavior has good results.
  3. **Be Accepting** (*Rom. 14:1; 15:1, 7; 16:1-17*): Not everyone is in the same place spiritually. Therefore, those who are more mature should accept those who are less mature. This requires humility, patience, and forbearance (*Eph. 4:2*).
  4. **Be a Peacemaker** (*Rom. 14:19*): There are peacemakers and peace breakers. God has called us to pursue peace when it is in our strength to do so (*Rom. 12:18*).
  5. **Protect Unity** (*Rom. 16:17; Acts 20:28-30*): There are those who intentionally want to destroy Christian unity. It is incumbent upon all of us (church members and church leaders) to be alert to divisive people and confront them with gentleness and love.
- How Can We Hinder Unity in the Church?
    1. **Be Selfish** (*Rom. 13:13*): Paul warned us to avoid strife and jealousy, both of which are selfish behaviors. Strife is contention for superiority, and jealousy is a fear of losing superiority to others. Selfishness only angers, embitters, and divides people.
    2. **Be Judgmental** (*Rom. 14:10, 13*): When we make quick, irrational, and critical judgments about others, we can hurt people and hinder unity. Judgmental people tend to gossip and/or slander others to demean, defame, or destroy them.
    3. **Be Divisive** (*Rom. 16:17*): Divisive people are like wolves who devour sheep. Teaching things that are false, spreading rumors or lies, striving to advance themselves at the expense of others — none of these promote unity in the church.

### The Bottom Line

Unity is important to God. Therefore, we should pursue those things that promote peace and unity.

### Questions to Consider

1. Your actions and words either help or hinder unity. Which best describe you? Why?
2. What is gossip? Why is it hurtful and sinful? How should you deal with gossip?
3. Are you a peacemaker or a peace breaker? What would others say you are? Explain why.