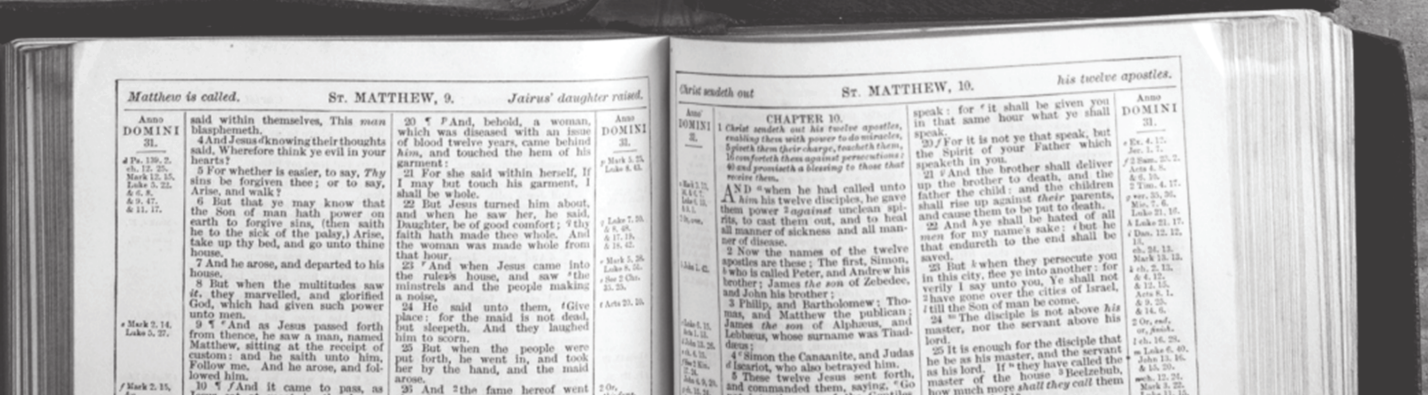


BIBLE PASSAGE COLLECTION

UNITY MATTERS



BE UNITED
IN CHRIST

BE UNITED IN CHRIST OUTREACH MINISTRY

Unity Matters: A Collection of Bible Passages

The mission of the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry is to teach and promote Christian unity in accordance with God's Word. A deep love for Christ and reverence for His Word, especially everything He teaches about Christian unity, is the heartbeat of our ministry.

A careful study of the Bible reveals that love-based Christian unity is important to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This Bible Passage Collection represents just a sampling of Scripture from God's Word to help believers understand that mutual love and unity among believers really matters.

UNITY MATTERS TO GOD THE FATHER

God created men and women to live in harmony with Himself and with one another (Genesis 1:26–2:5). When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, He set out to reconcile humanity to Himself (Genesis 3:15). He called Abraham to be father of all who have faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 4:16–17; Galatians 3:7, 9). God delivered Israel from Egypt to make them His treasured possession, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6 ^{NASB}), blessings He later extended to Christians (1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6, 5:10). Through Abraham God created a single community of faith, and through the exodus God established a single kingdom to serve the one God. Those called and redeemed by God are one.

The governing law of God's old covenant kingdom was love—love for God and love for neighbor (Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18). Love would distinguish Israel from other nations and unite them. The Jews were reminded of this when they assembled in Jerusalem for the three great national festivals, and as they arrived they would sing, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1

^{NASB}). God called and redeemed His people to live in loving harmony with one another. Unity is one of the Lord's greatest blessings; indeed, it is like everlasting life (Psalm 133:3).

Love would preserve the unity that God created. Love would distinguish them from all the other nations and hold them together as God's special people. It should not surprise us, then, to know that the Lord warns us against causing any kind of division among His people. In Proverbs 6:16–19 (^{NKJV}) we learn how much God hates those who sow division.

These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.

There are certain things the Lord hates, and sowing discord in His family is one of them. It is an abomination to Him. Every believer should be highly sensitive to avoiding whatever the Lord hates. Should we not forsake any practice He calls an abomination? Even the words of Jesus Christ pertaining to marriage teach us something about the Father's disdain for harming and breaking covenant relationships: “what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6 ^{NKJV}).

Notice how the Lord does not merely hate the act of division but the person who causes it. The Lord hates a person who sows discord in a family or, we could say, anyone who spreads strife among brothers and sisters in Christ. The seriousness of the sin of strife, discord, contentiousness, and division among God's children is found in many places in God's Word. Disunity in God's family is a great offense to Him. It is clear that unity matters to God the Father.

UNITY MATTERS TO GOD THE SON

The Son of God came to collect His Father's lost sheep and scattered children into one community, the church. Jesus explained that this would include not only Jews but Gentiles. "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16 NASB). He died not just to regather scattered Israel "but to bring together and unite all the children of God scattered around the world" (John 11:52 NLT). One shepherd and one flock. One Savior and Lord uniting all God's children worldwide. Clearly unity mattered to Christ.

Just how much it mattered is clear from Jesus' last evening with His disciples. When they began disputing again about which of them was the greatest, Jesus rebuked them and urged them to be servants, like Himself (Luke 22:24–27). Then He humbly washed their feet and demanded that they do likewise (John 13:12–17), for Jesus expects His followers to serve one another. More than this, He demands that they love one another. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35 NASB). Jesus' summary commandment for His new covenant community is that they love each other.

The command to love was not new to the Word of God. The summation of the whole Law is love. Jesus had previously stressed the inseparable importance of loving God with all one's being and one's neighbor as oneself (Matthew 22:34–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–37). Now, Jesus' new commandment involves a new object, standard, motive, context, power, and significance. The new object is Jesus' disciples—every follower of Jesus is required to love all His other followers. The new standard is as Christ has loved us—humbly, sacrificially, and unconditionally. The new motive is Christ's love for us—we love other believers because Christ first loved us. The new context is the new covenant, which Jesus died to establish in His blood (Luke 22:20). This new covenant

brought the blessing of the Holy Spirit, who enables Jesus' followers to love one another as He loved them. Finally, there is a new significance—when Christians love other Christians we prove to the world that we truly are Christ's disciples. Jesus is the true model of love. We are the reflection. In the last hours before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus restates this commandment.

John 15:12 NASB This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

John 15:17 NASB This I command you, that you love one another.

The repetition reinforces the importance. It also suggests the disciples will bear a discouraging tendency to disobey it. According to Jesus, those who obey Him will prove to be His disciples and friends (John 15:14). We should think about this for a moment. During His final hours with the disciples, Jesus directly commanded them to love one another five times (John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17).

Then, in chapter 17 we find one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture as Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, prays to the Father, the first person of the Trinity. In the final portion of this intimate prayer, John 17:20–26, we clearly hear the passion of Jesus Christ for unity and the critical importance of Christian love. With precious little time left before His departure, Jesus repeatedly stressed the importance of His disciples living together in selfless, visible love.

John 17:20–26 NKJV I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they 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. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 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.

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for you loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.

UNITY MATTERS TO GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

After Christ ascended, the Holy Spirit descended and unified the church He birthed. The Holy Spirit is the marvelous answer to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. The Holy Spirit united the disciples to Christ and to one another. The Holy Spirit gave them the desire and ability to live in unity: “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32 NKJV).

Because of the “fellowship of the Spirit,” we can be “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Philippians 2:1–2 NKJV). The bond we enjoy as fellow believers is called “the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3 NASB). We should not be surprised, then, that the Holy Spirit is grieved when we speak and act in a manner that harms unity. Scripture says, “Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:29–30 NKJV). The reason for the Spirit’s grief in Ephesians 4 is words that tear other Christians down rather than build them up. When we fight with our words, we grieve the Spirit.

UNITY MATTERS TO CHRISTIANS

When the apostle Paul noticed the apostle Peter withdrawing from Gentiles due to fear of the Jews, he intervened. In fact, he confronted Peter publicly,

because Peter was “not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (Galatians 2:14 NASB). Namely, his public separation from the Gentiles suggested that they were not truly justified by faith in Jesus Christ but by keeping the Jewish law. Since he did not want the other Jews to think poorly of him for eating with Gentiles, Peter started avoiding them. Through his actions Peter was trying to rebuild the “middle wall of separation” (Ephesians 2:14 NKJV), which Christ died to remove. Paul would not let it go. The unity of the church mattered to him.

When God causes us to be born again and places His Spirit within us, something marvelous happens. We change! Our relationship to God and others changes and radically. The Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts to understand and appreciate what God has said, and this alters the way we see God, ourselves, our relationships, and our world.

A study of unity in the Bible works exactly this way. Once we set our hearts to understand, celebrate, and honor the blessed unity God models and produces in His people, then phrases, verses, and stories from God’s Word stand out in ways they did not before. Soon it becomes vividly clear that unity is integral to the nature, mind, and mission of the Almighty God.

We cannot ignore the implications for our lives. God’s passion for unity in our churches starts filling our thoughts and affecting our relationships. We feel conviction for selfish thoughts, hurtful words, and our stubborn refusal to forgive and reconcile with brothers and sisters in Christ. No longer can we simply surrender our marriages and friendships to pride, conflict, and division. We feel a new motivation to wholeheartedly follow the prayers, thoughts, and patterns that Jesus Christ gave us to obey and sent His Spirit to help us obey.

Furthermore, we realize with amazement that this precious unity with God and other believers is the fruit of the gospel. Genuine, visible love and harmony among believers honors the Lord and proclaims His gospel to the world.

UNITY MATTERS IN SCRIPTURE

The following passages from the Bible are intended to provide a sampling from God's inspired Word to help you understand the importance of love-based Christian unity and the instructions for how to think, act, and behave toward your fellow believers.

In Christ We Are One Body and Family

Scripture provides a number of beautiful images to illustrate the nature of our relationship to one another as those who have been redeemed by the grace of God in Christ. The images of a body and a family are two of the most widely used to express our unity in Christ.

Ephesians 4:4–6 NKJV

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

Romans 12:4–5 NKJV

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function [each part has a special function], so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another [we all belong to each other].

1 Corinthians 12:12–14 NKJV

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and have all been made to drink into one Spirit [we all share the same spirit]. For in fact the body is not one member but many.

Galatians 3:26, 28 NKJV

For you are all sons [and daughters or children] of God through faith in Christ Jesus.... You are all one in Christ Jesus.

Galatians 6:10 NLT

Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially to those in the family of faith [born-again believers or God's children or fellow believers or brothers and sisters in Christ].

1 John 3:1–2 NASB

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are.... Beloved, now we are children of God.

Romans 8:16 NASB

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God [brothers and sisters in Christ].

1 Corinthians 12:24–25 NASB

God has so composed the body, ...so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same concern for one another.

John 1:12 NKJV

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.

Ephesians 2:13–14 NLT

But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far off away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ....He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in His own body on the cross, He broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.

Ephesians 2:16 NLT

Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of His death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

Unity Requires Humility, Love, and Obedience

While Christian unity is provided by God through Jesus Christ and created in His people through His Spirit, it does not preserve itself by accident. It takes faith in the Lord and diligent effort. It requires our humility, love, and obedience.

Ephesians 4:1–3 NKJV

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1 John 3:14 NKJV

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren [brothers and sisters who are believers]. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

1 John 3:16 NKJV

By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren [our brothers and sisters].

1 John 3:17 NKJV

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother [fellow believer or other Christians or one of God's children] in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?

1 Peter 3:8 NKJV

Finally, all of you be of one mind [united in spirit], having compassion for one another; love as brothers [other believers as members of God's family], be tenderhearted, be courteous.

Ephesians 4:1–6 NKJV

I...beseech you to walk...with all the lowliness and gentleness, with long suffering, bearing with one another in love [making allowance for each other's faults because of your love], endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace [binding yourselves together with peace]. There is one body and one Spirit; ... one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all.

1 Peter 2:17 NKJV

Honor all people. Love the brotherhood [the Christian fraternity of which Christ is the Head].

Matthew 12:50 NKJV

For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.

1 John 4:20 NKJV

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother [a fellow believer], he is a liar.

1 John 4:21 NKJV

And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother [fellow believer or other Christians or brothers and sisters in Christ] also.

1 Peter 1:22 NKJV

Through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren [brothers and sisters in Christ or fellow believers or other believers or other Christians], love one another fervently [deeply] with a pure heart.

Matthew 5:23–24 NKJV

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

Romans 12:16 NASB

Be of the same mind toward one another.... Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Romans 14:19 NASB

Pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

1 Corinthians 1:10 NKJV

Now I plead with you, brethren [believers or brothers and sisters in Christ], by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ...there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

2 Corinthians 13:11 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.

Colossians 3:14 NASB

Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

Colossians 3:15 NASB

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Unity Pleases God and Disunity Displeases Him

God delights in the unity of His people. Jesus died to reconcile us to God and one another. The Spirit dwells in us so that we would be one with God and each other. When we walk in unity, therefore, we please our heavenly Father. When we sow seeds of

discord, or fight and bicker with one another, we grieve His Spirit and dishonor His name.

Matthew 25:40 NKJV

Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren [brothers and sisters in Christ or other believers or God's children or My followers], you did it to Me.

James 2:14–17 NKJV

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Galatians 5:19–21 NKJV

Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in the past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

1 John 3:10 NKJV

Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother [other believers or other Christians].

Hebrews 6:10 NKJV

For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints [other believers], and do minister.

Christian Unity Displays the Glory of God

When we walk in unity as followers of Jesus Christ, we display the glory of our God more clearly. Throughout eternity the Triune God has dwelt in perfect unity and love, and He has created a world to display the glory of His unity and love.

Romans 15:5–6 NKJV

Be like-minded toward one another [other believers or fellow believers], according to Jesus Christ, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalms 133:1 NASB

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers [believers or brothers and sisters in Christ or Christians] to dwell together in unity!

Acts 4:32 NASB

And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them [they were willing to share with any believer in need].

Matthew 18:20 NKJV

For where two or three [believers or Christians or brothers and sisters in Christ or My followers or God's children] are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.

Philippians 1:27 NKJV

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that... I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.

Revelation 22:1–5 NKJV

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

CLOSING COMMENTARY

This Bible Passage Collection develops a clear and serious theme: Christian unity is important to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unity matters to God and it should matter deeply to us.

According to His Word, it is the Father's "good pleasure which He purposed in Himself" (Ephesians 1:9 NKJV) to "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Ephesians 1:10 NKJV). It is the Father's will to reconcile His people through Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18). The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ provide the way for us to be brought to God. Through Christ we are reconciled to one another (Ephesians 2:17), and we gain access to the Father through "one Spirit" (Ephesians 2:18 NASB). In other words, all three persons of the Trinity desire our unity and labor for our unity. If we love God, should we not desire what He desires and labor to the very end for which He labors?

John 14:23 NASB Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him."

Disunity among believers grieves the heart of God. He desires visible love and unity among His children. So, as His people we should live out Christian unity in accordance with His inspired Word. One day we will be fully united with God and other believers in Heaven so we should begin by practicing now. It is our prayer that as you read this Bible Passage Collection and the resources available on our website, you will apply them to your life, be led by the Holy Spirit, and help to bring about real and visible change in unifying the body of Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:9–10 NASB Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body,

according to what he has done whether good or bad.

A deep love and reverence for what the Bible teaches about Christian unity is at the heart of the Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry. We have developed many Bible-based resources to help our fellow believers to better understand our Lord's passion for His children to be united in Christ for His glory. Our website, BeUnitedinChrist.com, is the resource center for these life transforming resources.

When believers stand together on the truth of God's Word, we stand on an unshakeable foundation. When we are motivated by the love of God—when we are growing in love for God and others—we preserve the unity of the Spirit. Praise God, He has created us to be united in Christ.



Unity Matters Bible Passage Collection

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