

## BOOK SUMMARY

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# On the Unity of the Church

Cyprian

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# BE UNITED IN CHRIST BOOK SUMMARY

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*Book Summary: On the Unity of the Church*  
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# Be United in Christ

Book Summary

*On the Unity of the Church*

Cyprian

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## **Author**

Cyprian was an important North African church leader in the third century. He was born around 200 into an elite, wealthy family and became a prominent public speaker in the city of Carthage. In 246, he converted to Christianity and gave most of his possessions to the poor. Just two or three years later, Cyprian was elected Bishop of Carthage, a position he held for a decade until he was executed for his faith in 258.

Cyprian's rapid rise to church leadership occurred at a challenging time. In January of 250, the Roman Emperor decreed that all citizens must perform a public sacrifice to the gods to prove their loyalty, to promote their patriotism, and to seek divine aid against the empire's enemies. Those refusing to do so were persecuted, and some were even executed. Cyprian avoided capture and remained in hiding until the emperor's death in 251, shepherding his flock through his writings.

After Cyprian returned to Carthage, he helped resolve many church issues that arose due to the persecution. In 257, a new emperor again demanded pagan sacrifices. When Cyprian refused, he was exiled, imprisoned, and finally beheaded. His letters and theological works were especially influential in shaping the way later Christians thought about the church.

## **Overview**

Cyprian wrote *On the Unity of the Church* in the aftermath of a systematic, empire-wide persecution. Threatened with torture and execution, many professing Christians offered pagan sacrifices, paid others to do so for them, or obtained a receipt saying that they had complied with the emperor's decree. After the persecution ended, many who had compromised wanted back into the church. This created controversy whether to readmit these "lapsed" believers. Some, called "rigorists," said that those who had denied the faith could not return to the church, while the "laxists" said they could.

Many laxists were also "confessors" who had confessed Christ even though persecuted. These heroes of the faith wrote "letters of peace" on behalf of the lapsed, which were influential in making decisions about readmission into the church. This raised the question, however, of who had the authority to readmit lapsed believers, church leaders or confessors. Cyprian argued that those who had lapsed could be restored if they proved themselves truly repentant. He further asserted that it was the bishops, the leaders of local churches, and not the confessors who had the authority to decide.<sup>1</sup> During this debate, some rigorists and laxists formed new churches, and in response Cyprian wrote *On the Unity of the Church* to dispute them and to preserve the integrity of the church.

*On the Unity of the Church* contains 27 chapters arranged in four sections. Cyprian warns of the danger of divisions (Chapters 1–3), presents the basis for church unity (Chapters 4–9), addresses the enemies of unity (Chapters 10–22), and concludes with an appeal for unity (Chapters 23–27).

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek word for "bishop" means "overseer," which in the New Testament is the equivalent of "elder" (1 Timothy 3:1–2; Titus 1:5, 7). In the first century, churches were led by a group of overseers/elders (Acts 14:23; 20:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1), but by the middle of the second century local churches came to be led by a single overseer called a bishop. Cyprian is thus referring to the official, ordained church leaders overseeing local congregations.

## **Section 1: The Danger of Divisions (Chapters 1–3)**

The church in Cyprian’s day had just endured open persecution, but “the enemy is more to be feared and to be guarded against when he creeps on us secretly.” The devil has always worked craftily, from his deception of Eve to his temptations of Jesus. He continues to creep like a serpent into churches to try to mislead members into forsaking the truth and embracing error. The devil “has invented heresies and divisions, whereby he might ruin the faith, might corrupt the truth, might divide the unity.” Believers must, therefore, remain alert against Satan’s schemes and carefully follow the model of Christ who successfully resisted the devil. Jesus remained obedient to God, “from which an example is given us . . . to stand in the footsteps of a conquering Christ.”

Cyprian reminds his readers that it is the obedient who stand steadfast against life’s storms, who enter into eternal life, and who are Jesus’ true friends (Matthew 7:24–27; 19:17; John 14:15). Obedience to Christ is an essential part of being a disciple of Christ, for “how can a man say that he believes in Christ, who does not do what Christ commanded him to do?” Christians must believe the Word and obey its author if they are to stand firm against the enemy. Satan tries to corrupt the faith and fragment the church, and the church’s only defense is to “return to the source of truth,” “seek the head,” and “keep the teaching of the heavenly Master.”

## **Section 2: The Basis for Church Unity (Chapters 4–9)**

Cyprian here presents his positive case for the unity of the church. The church’s unity originates with Christ, is identified with the church’s bishops, requires faithfulness, is symbolized by Jesus’ seamless robe, is consistently taught in Scripture, and is peace-loving.

### **The Church’s Unity Originates with Christ (4)**

The church’s unity is based in Christ. He is the church’s builder, head, and bridegroom (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:25–33). Therefore, there can only be one church, for Christ has only one temple, one body, and one bride. To emphasize this oneness, when Jesus revealed His design for the church, He initially focused on one person, Peter.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven (Matthew 16:18–19).

The reason Jesus singled out Peter in communicating His intention to build His church was to emphasize its singular nature. “That He might set forth unity, He arranged by His authority the origin of that unity, as beginning from one.” For the same reason, Jesus focused on Peter when He said, “Feed My sheep” (John 21:17). By initially addressing one person, Jesus highlights His church’s oneness.

Jesus never intended, however, for Peter to have exclusive or supreme authority over the church, for He later gave the same authority to all the apostles (Matthew 18:18; John 20:21–23). As Cyprian explains, “Assuredly the rest of the apostles were also the same as Peter, blessed with a like partnership both of honor and power; but the beginning proceeds from unity.” Jesus initially focused on a single person, Peter, in order to stress the church’s unity, not to create an office that would dominate the rest of the church.

Because Christ only has one church, anyone who opposes or abandons Christ’s church opposes and abandons Christ Himself.

Does he who does not hold this unity of the church think that he holds the faith? Does he who strives against and resists the church trust that he is in the church, when moreover the blessed apostle Paul teaches the same thing, and sets forth the sacrament of unity, saying, “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” (Ephesians 4:4–6a)?

Christians who do not preserve church unity reveal that they lack saving faith, however Biblical their profession of faith may otherwise be.

### **The Church’s Unity Is Identified with the Church’s Bishops (5)**

The unity of the church originates with Christ then flows through Peter to the apostles and then to the bishops. Church leaders should be “one and undivided,” for “the body of bishops is one, each part of which is held by each one for the whole.” The bishops collectively represent the one church by preserving and proclaiming the church’s one gospel. Christ the Good Shepherd entrusts His sheep to many shepherds, and the consistency of their message confirms the validity of their office.

God multiplies His churches across the earth in order to distribute His blessings. However, the number and diversity of churches in no way indicates that there is more than one universal church. It is the abundant fruitfulness of the church, not the fragmentation of the church, that produces so many churches. They all remain united in Christ, who is the single source of their life and blessings.

The church also is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun, but one light, and many branches of a tree, but one strength based in its firm root, and since from one spring flow many streams, although the multiplicity seems scattered in the bounty of an overflowing abundance, yet the unity is still preserved in the source. Separate a ray of the sun from its body of light, its unity does not allow a division of light. Break a branch from a tree—when broken, it will not be able to bud. Cut off the stream from its fountain, and that which is cut off dries up. Thus also the church, shone over with the light of the Lord, sheds forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere scattered, and the unity of the body is not separated. Her fruitful abundance spreads her branches over the whole world. She broadly expands her rivers, freely flowing, yet her head is one, her source one. And she is one mother, plentiful in the results of fruitfulness: from her womb we are born, by her milk we are nourished, and by her spirit we are made alive.

## **The Church's Unity Requires Faithfulness (6)**

The church's unity demands a twofold faithfulness: the church must remain faithful to Christ, and Christians must remain faithful to the church. "The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous; she is uncorrupted and pure. She knows one home and she guards with pure modesty the holiness of one bed. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom." As the bride of Christ, the church must be a loyal spouse in every way, and she must raise her spiritual children to be faithful to Christ as well.

In Israel, those who abandoned the Lord to worship other gods were guilty of spiritual adultery. So also, those who abandon Christ to join false churches are guilty of spiritual infidelity. "Whoever is separated from the church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the church. Nor can he who forsakes the church of Christ hope to receive the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger, he is profane, and he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother."

This last sentence has often been misunderstood, but if read rightly, it makes good, Biblical sense. The Bible states that no one comes to the Father but through Christ (John 14:6). Men are saved by Christ through one gospel (Galatians 1:6–9). This gospel is only found in the one church. The church is the bride of Christ, who bears spiritual children to the Father through His Son (John 1:12). Therefore, those who do not have the church as their mother do not have God as their Father.

To reject the church is to reject the sole means of deliverance from divine judgment that God has graciously provided. "If anyone could escape who was outside the ark of Noah, then he also may escape who shall be outside of the church." Jesus warned, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters" (Luke 11:23). Therefore, Cyprian also warns, "He who breaks the peace and the unity of Christ does so in opposition to Christ. He who gathers elsewhere than in the church scatters the church of Christ." Cyprian concludes with a sober caution: "He who does not hold this unity does not hold God's law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, and does not hold life and salvation."

## **The Church's Unity Is Symbolized by Jesus' Seamless Robe (7)**

Cyprian sees symbolic significance in the fact that Jesus' tunic was "without seam, woven from the top in one piece" (John 19:23). "That coat bore with it a unity that came down from the top, that is, that came from Heaven and the Father, which was not at all to be torn by the receiver and the possessor." From this Cyprian argues that "he who parts and divides the church of Christ cannot possess the garment of Christ." All those who "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 13:14) must keep the cloak of Christ undivided. "Because Christ's people cannot be torn, His robe, woven and united throughout, is not divided by those who possess it. Undivided, united, and connected, the church shows the cohesive oneness of our people who put on Christ." Believers should be exceedingly fearful, therefore, to do anything that divides Christ's church. "Who, then, is so wicked and faithless, who is so insane with the madness of disunity, that either he should believe that the unity of God can be divided, or should dare to tear it—the garment of the Lord—the church of Christ?"

## **The Church's Unity Is Taught throughout Scripture (8)**

The oneness of God's people is taught by Jesus, Paul, and the Old Testament. Jesus said, "There will be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). So how, asks Cyprian, "does anyone believe that in one place there can be either many shepherds or many flocks?" The apostle Paul pleaded "that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Corinthians 1:10). He also urged believers to walk worthy of their calling, "bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2b–3). Thus, those who split or separate from the one true church disobey the teachings of Christ and Paul. They also violate the consistent pattern of Scripture. When God delivers His people from judgment, He typically grants them one means of salvation, whether this be the ark, the exodus, or the church.

## **The Church's Unity Is Peace-Loving (9)**

Cyprian concludes this section by noting the gentle, peaceful spirit that should characterize Christians.

The Holy Spirit came as a dove, a simple and joyous creature, not bitter with gall, not cruel in its bite, not violent with the tearing of its claws, loving human dwellings, and knowing the association of one home. When doves have young, they bring forth their young together. When they fly abroad, they remain in their flights by the side of one another, spending their life in mutual relationship, acknowledging the unity of peace with the kiss of the beak, in all things fulfilling the law of being in unison. This is the simplicity that should be known in the church, this is the love that should be attained, that the love of the brotherhood may imitate the doves, that their gentleness and meekness may be like the lambs and sheep.

Because God's people are to be peaceful, it is beneficial when persistent troublemakers leave a church. Their departure helps restore harmony in Christ's community and also reveals that they never truly belonged to the household of God.

We are to be congratulated when persons such as these are separated from the church, lest they should lay waste the doves and sheep of Christ with their cruel and contagious venom.... Let no one think that the good can depart from the church. The wind does not carry away the wheat, nor does the hurricane uproot the tree that is based on a solid root. The light straws are tossed about by the tempest, the feeble trees are overthrown by the onset of the whirlwind. The apostle John severely condemns these people when he says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us" (1 John 2:19a).

## **Section 3: The Enemies of Unity (Chapters 10–22)**

In chapters 10–22, Cyprian addresses those who had abandoned the true church to form "churches" of their own. He explains why God permits false teachers (10–11), how Scripture discredits them (12–16), and how Christians should treat them (17–19). He closes by discussing the "confessors," those Christians who had remained faithful under persecution but some of whom had since sinned and/or left the church (20–22).



## **Why God Permits False Teachers (10–11)**

God permits false teachers in order to distinguish true and false believers. As Paul wrote, “There must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you” (1 Corinthians 11:19). The way people respond to God’s Word and relate to His church identifies them as either Christians or non-Christians. “Thus the faithful are approved, and the faithless are detected. Thus even here, before the day of judgment, the souls of the righteous and of the unrighteous are already divided, and the chaff is separated from the wheat.” Though God sovereignly uses false teachers for His own purposes, they are nonetheless false and stand condemned for their error.

The specific error that Cyprian confronted was that of “schism,” splitting the true church.<sup>2</sup> It grieves God when one willfully creates division in the body of Christ by illegitimately separating from the church and encouraging others to do the same. Cyprian condemns church-splitters as “deceiving with serpent’s tongue, and artful in corrupting the truth, vomiting forth deadly poisons from diseased tongues. Their speech spreads like a cancer, whose arguments form a deadly poison in the heart and breast of everyone.”

God warned His people not to listen to false prophets who “speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:16). Those who break from the true church to form their own congregations may appear to preach, teach, and offer the sacraments, but in reality none of these activities are legitimate because those performing them have cut themselves off from the sole source of truth and grace. “They cannot attain to the reward of peace, since they have broken the Lord’s peace with the madness of strife.”

## **How Scripture Discredits False Teachers (12–16)**

Cyprian uses God’s Word to undermine his opponents’ attempts to justify their teachings and actions. For example, the leaders of the false churches argued that Christ was present with them since He had said in Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.” Cyprian points out that the false bishops deceitfully failed to quote the preceding verse, “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in Heaven.” By placing agreement first, Jesus made unity a prerequisite both for prayer and for His presence among His disciples. “How can two or three be assembled together in Christ’s name, who, it is evident, are separated from Christ and from His gospel?”

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<sup>2</sup> In the Bible, the word “schism” is used to describe a rip in a garment (Mark 2:21), a tear in a net (John 21:11), a split in a rock (Matthew 27:51), the tearing of the temple veil (Luke 23:45), and the splitting of the heavens (Mark 1:10). The term is also used to describe divisions between people (Acts 14:4; 23:7), which is especially offensive within the family of God (1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:18; 12:25).

Cyprian's logic is this: Since agreement among Christ's apostles was a prerequisite for His presence, and since the bishops of the church are the successors of the apostles, then those who disagree with the bishops are separated from the true church and the presence of Christ. At that time there had not yet been any split between the Western church and the Eastern church, nor between Protestants and Roman Catholics. There existed only one, holy, catholic [universal] church. Christ's gospel was preached by Christ's apostles, who passed it on to their disciples, the bishops of the church. Therefore, argues Cyprian, to hear the pure gospel one should go to a bishop who could trace his teaching through the apostles back to Christ, not to a self-appointed teacher who had broken away from the established church.

So offensive is disunity that if someone who splits a church dies for his so-called faith, his death will not be honored by God. "He cannot be a martyr who is not in the church.... Christ gave us peace. He commanded us to be in agreement and of one mind. He charged the bonds of love to be kept uncorrupted and pure. He cannot show himself a martyr who has not maintained brotherly love."

Loving unity in the church anticipates loving unity in Heaven, for "they cannot dwell with God who would not be of one mind in God's church." Conversely, disunity is bad fruit from a bad tree, which identifies false prophets who are wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15–20). Jesus said that loving God and loving one's neighbor were the great and foremost commandments upon which hang all the law and the prophets (Matthew 22:37–40). Clearly, the Lord demands loving unity of His disciples. "But what unity does he keep, what love does he maintain or consider, who divides the church, destroys the faith, disturbs the peace, disperses love, and cheapens the sacrament?"

### **How to Treat False Teachers (17–19)**

Christians must avoid, ignore, and expel false teachers. Jesus warned His disciples that religious leaders who mislead are "blind leaders of the blind" (Matthew 15:14a), and Cyprian strongly condemns any person who causes another to stumble. "He bears arms against the church, he contends against God's anointed. He is an enemy of the altar, a rebel against Christ's sacrifice, faithless with regards to the faith, unholy regarding religion, a disobedient servant, an unholy son, and a hostile brother.... He does not know that he who strives against God's anointed will be punished by God on account of his arrogance."

The Old Testament offers several examples of God's judgment on those who presumed to approach Him apart from the religious leaders He appointed.

Thus Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who endeavored to claim to themselves the power of sacrificing in opposition to Moses and Aaron the priest, underwent immediate punishment for their attempts. (Numbers 16)

Thus also Uzziah the king, who boldly tried to burn incense in the temple against God's law, when Azariah the priest stood against him, would not be obedient and yield, was cursed by the divine indignation and was infected on his forehead by the spot of leprosy. (2 Chronicles 26:16–23)

And the sons of Aaron, who placed strange fire upon the altar, which the Lord had not commanded, were at once extinguished in the presence of an avenging Lord. (Leviticus 10)

These terrifying instances of divine judgment demonstrate God's disapproval of those who leave Christ's churches to form their own. Indeed, those who split the church are guilty of a worse offense than the lapsed who compromised their faith but then later repented. A person must be hardened indeed who ignores such strong warnings and endangers the body of Christ by threatening its unity.

### **The Case of the Confessors (20–22)**

The “confessors” had confessed Christ even when persecuted. They had proven faithful under pressure and had suffered for the faith, so they were viewed as heroes in the Christian community. Some, however, had since fallen into sin or fallen away from the true church. Therefore, Cyprian addresses the confessors' sins, their risks and responsibilities, and their general faithfulness.

Past faithfulness does not prevent future failures, for every person is susceptible to sin. “Neither does confession make a man free from the snares of the devil, nor does it defend a man who is still placed in the world with a continual security from temptations, and dangers, and onsets, and attacks of the world.” Solomon was greater than any confessor and yet fell into immorality and idolatry. His example shows the need for ongoing alertness and grace to remain faithful to God.

Great champions for Christ also carry greater risks and a greater responsibility to model godliness.

He is a confessor; but after confession his peril is greater, because the adversary is more provoked. He is a confessor; for this cause he should all the more stand on the side of the Lord's gospel, since he has by the gospel attained glory from the Lord. For the Lord says, “To whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Let no one perish by the example of a confessor. Let no one learn injustice, let no one learn arrogance, and let no one learn treachery from the manners of a confessor. He is a confessor, let him be lowly and quiet. Let him be in his doings modest with discipline, so that he who is called a confessor of Christ may imitate Christ whom he confesses.... Let not the tongue which has confessed Christ be evil-speaking. Let it not cause disturbance and unrest. Let it not be heard jarring with criticisms and quarrels.

Though some confessors may have faltered, their failure does not tarnish the witness of the majority who remained true, no more than Judas' betrayal discredited the testimony of the true apostles.

### **Section 4: An Appeal for Unity (Chapters 23–27)**

Cyprian closes his work with a concluding appeal for unity. He desires that “our rejoicing mother [the church] may enclose in her bosom the one body of a people at agreement.”

Preserving unity in the church requires separating from those who divide the church. As the apostle Paul wrote, “We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us” (2 Thessalonians 3:6). Therefore in obedience to God's Word, believers must avoid those whose lives and teachings jeopardize the harmony of God's people.

We must withdraw, no, rather we must flee from those who fall away, lest, while anyone is associated with those who walk wickedly and goes on in ways of error and of sin, he himself also, wandering away from the path of the true road, should be found guilty in the same way. God is one, and Christ is one, and His church is one, and the faith is one, and the people are joined into a substantial unity of body by the cement of peaceful agreement.

Thus, unity is vital but only comes with effort. Christians must diligently pursue peace and deliberately avoid conflict in order to preserve and enjoy the peace of Christ.

Among His divine commands and beneficial teachings, the Lord, when He was now very near to His death, added this one, saying, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you” (John 14:27). He gave this to us as a heritage. He promised all the gifts and rewards of which He spoke through the preservation of peace. If we are fellow-heirs with Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ. If we are sons of God, we should be peacemakers. “Blessed,” says He, “are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9). The sons of God must be peacemakers, gentle in heart, simple in speech, agreeing in affection, faithfully linked to one another in the bonds of unity.

Those who neglect unity do not “take to heart the day of the Lord, and the wrath of God, and the punishments to come upon unbelievers, and the eternal torments decreed for the faithless.”

Christ may come at any time, so His servants must be ready at any time to give an account to their master. “Let us, beloved brethren, awaken ourselves as much as we can; and breaking the slumber of our ancient laziness, let us be watchful to observe and to do the Lord’s commands... If these commands be observed, if these warnings and precepts be kept, we cannot be overtaken in slumber by the deceit of the devil; but we shall reign with Christ in His kingdom as servants who watch.”

## **Appraisal**

*On the Unity of the Church* is the first work dedicated to this subject in the history of the church. Despite its significance, however, it is rarely used as a resource for church unity. One reason for this is its emphases on the church’s central role in salvation and the bishops’ central role in the church sound suspiciously Roman Catholic to Protestant ears. However, Cyprian wrote before there were Protestants or Catholics, and even before there was an Eastern and a Western church. Christians in the third century generally viewed themselves as one community in Christ, but this identity was threatened by external persecution and internal divisions. So, Cyprian challenged Christ’s followers to stay true to Christ by staying true to His church. It is in the true church that the true gospel is preached by God’s appointed overseers. Christ has only one body, and its members must be in harmony. God’s Son has only one bride, and she must remain faithful to her groom. The church’s unity is central to her identity and vital to her ministry, therefore believers must strive to be unified and fight all temptations to divide. Christians today need to embrace Cyprian’s Biblical vision of a united, indivisible church to preserve the beautiful integrity of the seamless robe of Christ.

## **Connection to Be United in Christ**

Cyprian's call to unity is desperately needed today. Sinners create disunity by nature, and saved sinners are no exception. Therefore, church leaders must labor to preserve church unity and to prevent disagreements between believers from becoming divisions. Christians need to embrace the fact that every person who has a personal relationship with Christ also has a community relationship with the body of Christ. Followers of Christ must also realize that although the Good Shepherd sought and saved them individually, they are to follow Him as a flock under the direction of His shepherds. Jesus' disciples cannot ignore the fact that the sign of their discipleship is their love for other disciples (John 13:34–35). Cyprian's *On the Unity of the Church* is an important reminder that all who are in Christ must Be United in Christ.

## Key Quotations

“Does he who does not hold this unity of the church think that he holds the faith? Does he who strives against and resists the church trust that he is in the church, when moreover the blessed apostle Paul teaches the same thing, and sets forth the sacrament of unity, saying, ‘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’ (Ephesians 4:4–6a)?” (4)

“The church also is one, which is spread abroad far and wide into a multitude by an increase of fruitfulness. As there are many rays of the sun, but one light, and many branches of a tree, but one strength based in its firm root, and since from one spring flow many streams, although the multiplicity seems scattered in the bounty of an overflowing abundance, yet the unity is still preserved in the source. Separate a ray of the sun from its body of light, its unity does not allow a division of light. Break a branch from a tree—when broken, it will not be able to bud. Cut off the stream from its fountain, and that which is cut off dries up. Thus also the church, shone over with the light of the Lord, sheds forth her rays over the whole world, yet it is one light which is everywhere scattered, and the unity of the body is not separated. Her fruitful abundance spreads her branches over the whole world. She broadly expands her rivers, freely flowing, yet her head is one, her source one.” (5)

“Whoever is separated from the church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the church. Nor can he who forsakes the church of Christ hope to receive the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger, he is profane, and he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the church for his mother.” (6)

“He who does not hold this unity does not hold God’s law, does not hold the faith of the Father and the Son, and does not hold life and salvation.” (6)

“Let no one think that the good can depart from the church. The wind does not carry away the wheat, nor does the hurricane uproot the tree that is based on a solid root. The light straws are tossed about by the tempest, the feeble trees are overthrown by the onset of the whirlwind. The apostle John severely condemns these people when he says, ‘They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us’ (1 John 2:19a).” (9)

“Such a one is to be turned away from and avoided, whoever he may be, that is separated from the church. Such a one is perverted and sins, and is condemned of his own self. Does he think that he has Christ, who acts in opposition to Christ’s priests, who separates himself from the company of His clergy and people? He bears arms against the church, he contends against God’s anointed. He is an enemy of the altar, a rebel against Christ’s sacrifice.” (17)

“We must withdraw, no, rather we must flee from those who fall away, lest, while anyone is associated with those who walk wickedly and goes on in ways of error and of sin, he himself also, wandering away from the path of the true road, should be found guilty in the same way. God is one, and Christ is one, and His church is one, and the faith is one, and the people are joined into a substantial unity of body by the cement of peaceful agreement.” (23)

“The son of peace should seek peace and pursue it... If we are fellow-heirs with Christ, let us abide in the peace of Christ. If we are sons of God, we should be peacemakers.” (24)

## Key Bible Passages (NASB)

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven will enter.” **(Matthew 7:21)**

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.” **(Matthew 7:24–25)**

“I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in Heaven.” **(Matthew 16:18–19)**

“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in Heaven. For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst.” **(Matthew 18:19–20)**

“Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes.” **(Luke 12:35–37a)**

“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)**

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.” **(John 14:27)**

“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.” **(1 Corinthians 1:10)**

“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.” **(1 Corinthians 12:12)**

“But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.” **(2 Corinthians 11:3)**

“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.” **(Ephesians 2:19–22)**

“Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” **(Ephesians 4:1–3)**

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.” **(2 Thessalonians 3:6)**

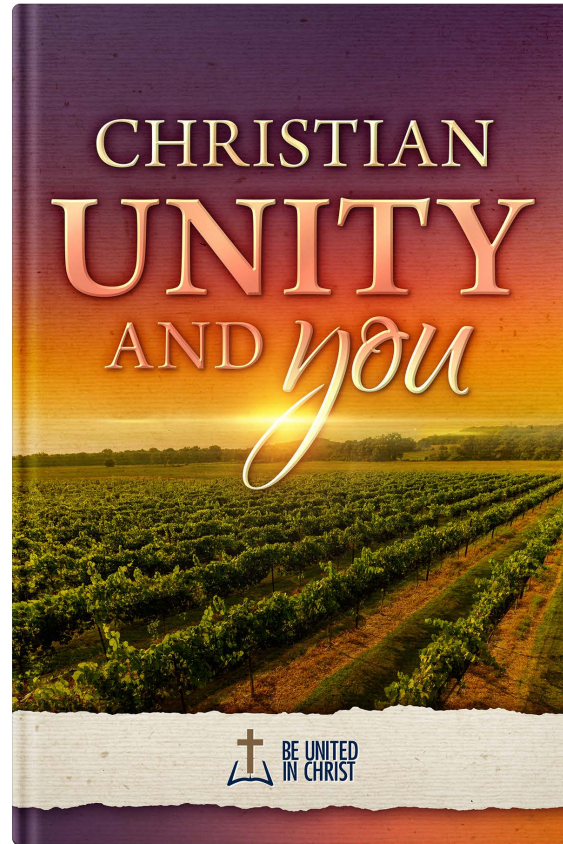
“Reject a factious man after a first and second warning.” **(Titus 3:10)**

“We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” **(1 John 4:16)**

# YOU CAN LOVE LIKE JESUS.

Imagine how the world could be transformed if Christians loved each other the way Jesus asked them to. Jesus' life is the greatest example of love that the world has ever seen. He told His disciples to love one another as He loved them. When believers live in visible love and unity as Christ lived—unity based on Biblical truth—we will begin to experience a taste of what Heaven will be like.

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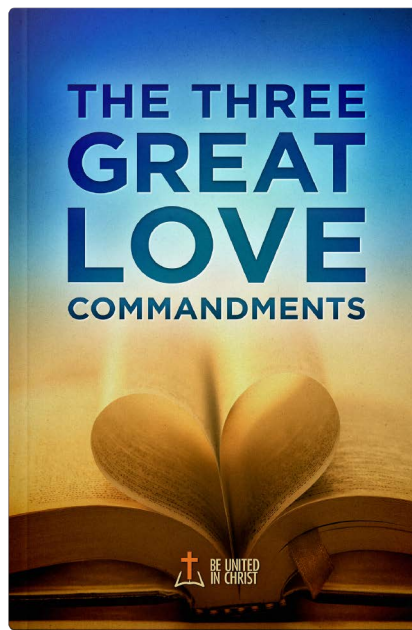
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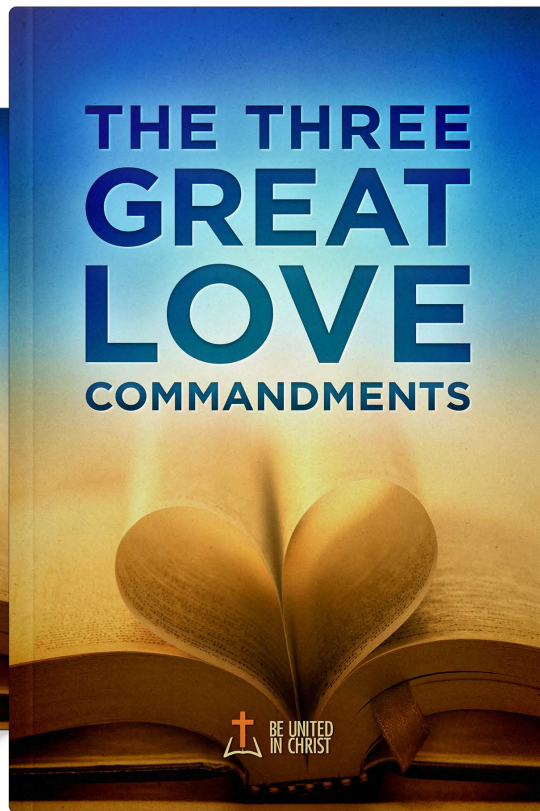
# A THIRD GREAT LOVE COMMANDMENT.

Within every human heart is the desire to be loved and to show love. It is the mark of God on our lives—a God who embodies love, who IS love, according to the Bible. In His Word, God gives us three great commandments, rules for operating in love with Him, with others, and with our Christian family. These commands should provide the foundation for everything we say and do.

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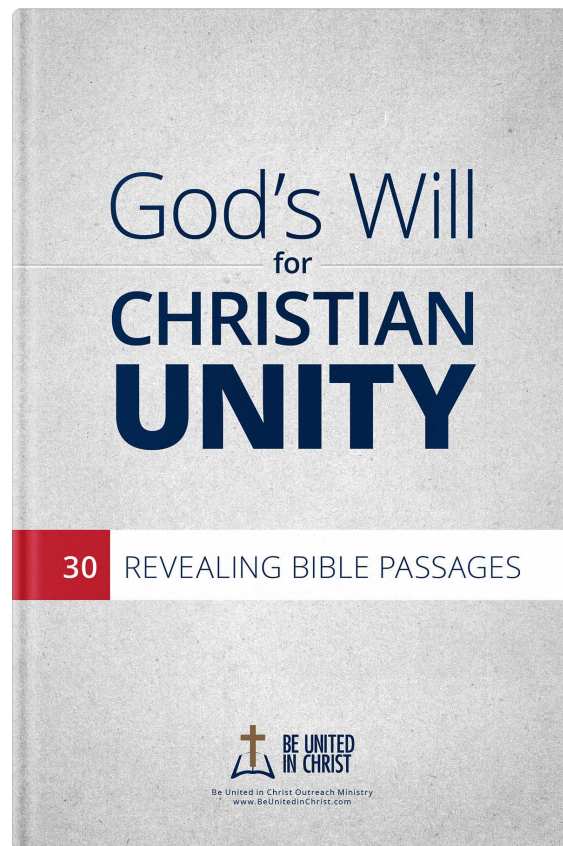
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# BELIEVE IN GOD? READY TO DO HIS WILL?

The theme of Christian unity is found throughout the Bible. *God's Will for Christian Unity* clearly reveals, in thirty Bible passages, our Lord's passion and instruction on the meaning, importance, and manifestation of Christian unity. Understanding this collection of Bible passages will help you to know how you should think, feel, and act in relation to other believers in accordance with God's will.

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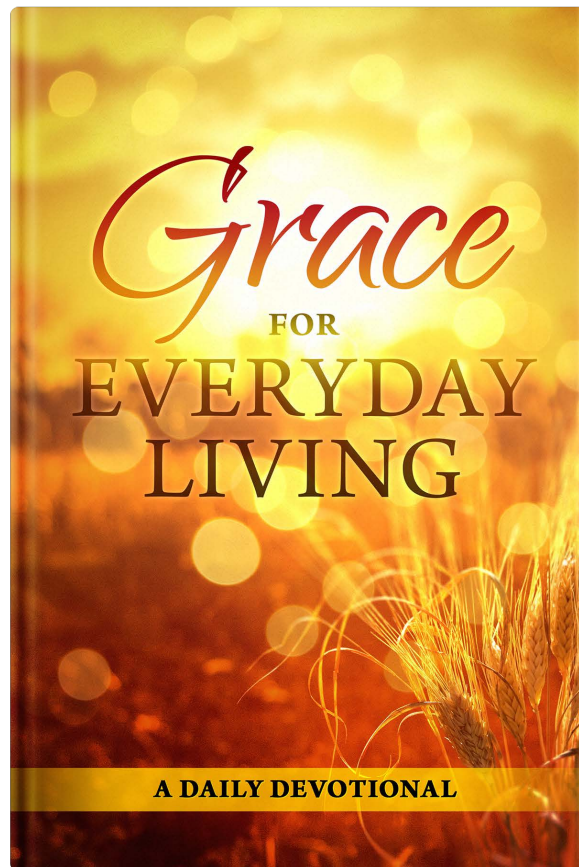
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God sees you. He loves you. And He wants you to experience a full and blessed life. In the 365-day devotional, *Grace for Everyday Living*, some of Christianity's most respected voices cast light on topics such as how to maintain a peaceful spirit, love others, and freely enjoy God's grace and mercy. Your life will be transformed as you discover the excitement of pleasing God and obeying His Word.

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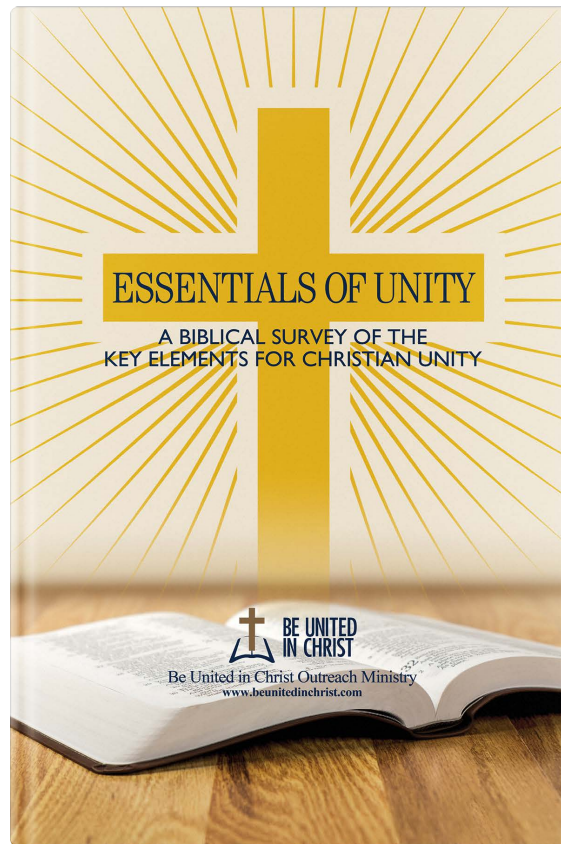
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# UNITY IS ESSENTIAL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

The Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry has written *Essentials of Unity* from a great sense of conviction ... to better understand God's will for the unity of His people, how He achieves it, and what He asks of each of us in preserving it. *Essentials of Unity* explains significant Biblical themes for understanding Christian unity and how these Biblical themes connect to one another in the storyline of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

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# FEEL THE PASSION OF CHRIST FOR UNITY.

In John 17:20–23, Jesus prayed for His disciples to be one ... united with Him and each other. In His prayer, we hear the passion of Jesus Christ for the union of His people to God and to one another. *One: The Passion and Prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ* was written to help God's people understand the nature of this unity as well as how it is to be accomplished in the body of Christ.

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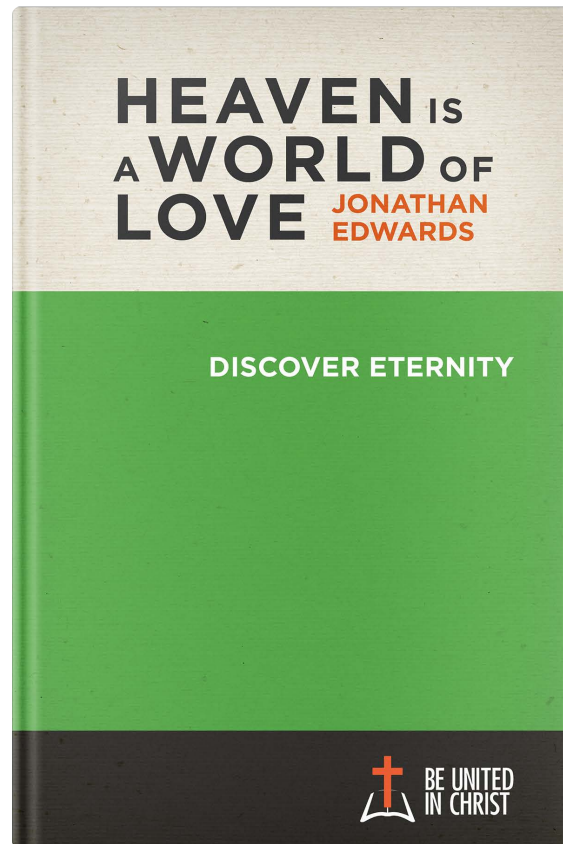
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In the history of Christianity, no one has written as vividly on the subjects of Heaven and Hell as Jonathan Edwards. *Heaven Is a World of Love* combines Edwards' most powerful sermons and presents them in modern-day language. Be encouraged with the hope of Heaven, sobered by the horrors of Hell, and assured that you can spend eternity enjoying God's love.

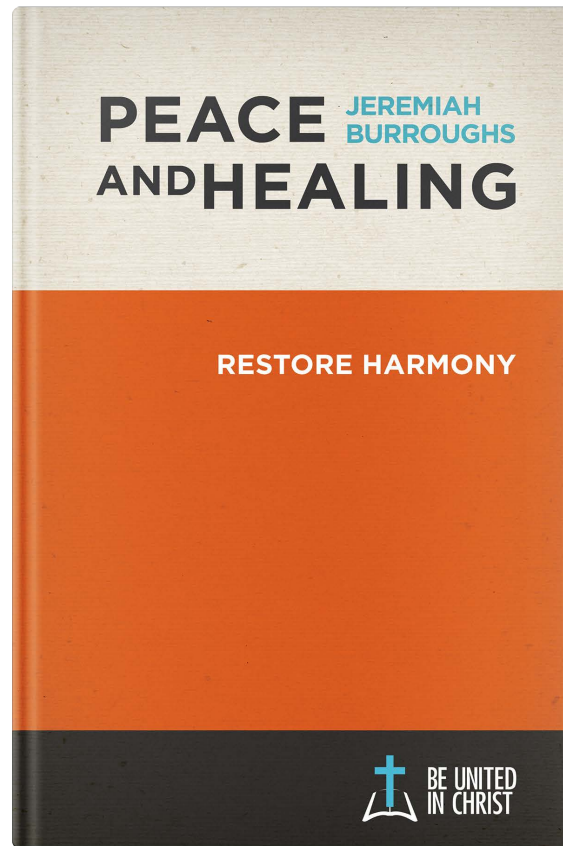
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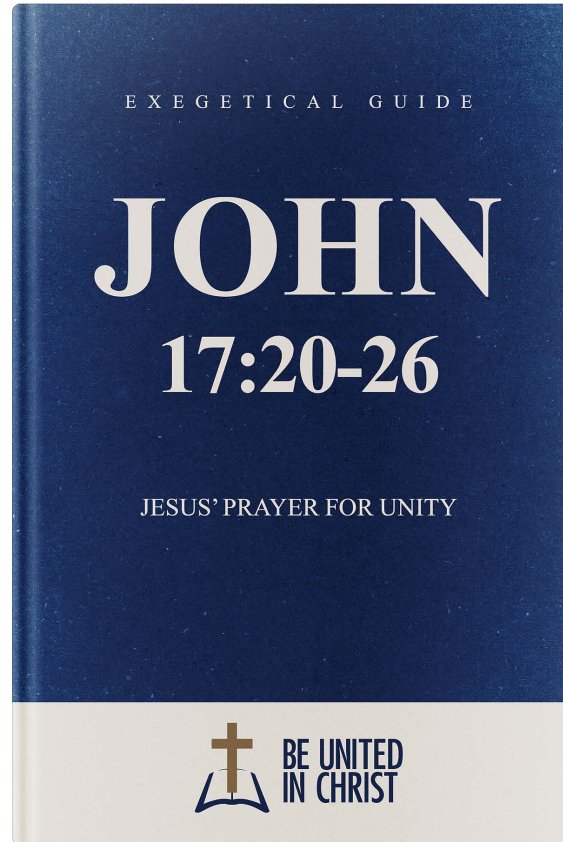
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# LEARN WHAT JESUS PRAYED FOR YOU.

In the hours just before He was crucified, Jesus prayed for you. But what did He pray? And why does it matter? With the *John 17:20–26* Exegetical Guide, you will see through Jesus' eyes and be moved by what He prayed for you at this critical time. You will find where you belong. And your desire to draw closer to God and to other believers will grow as you read this inspiring guide.

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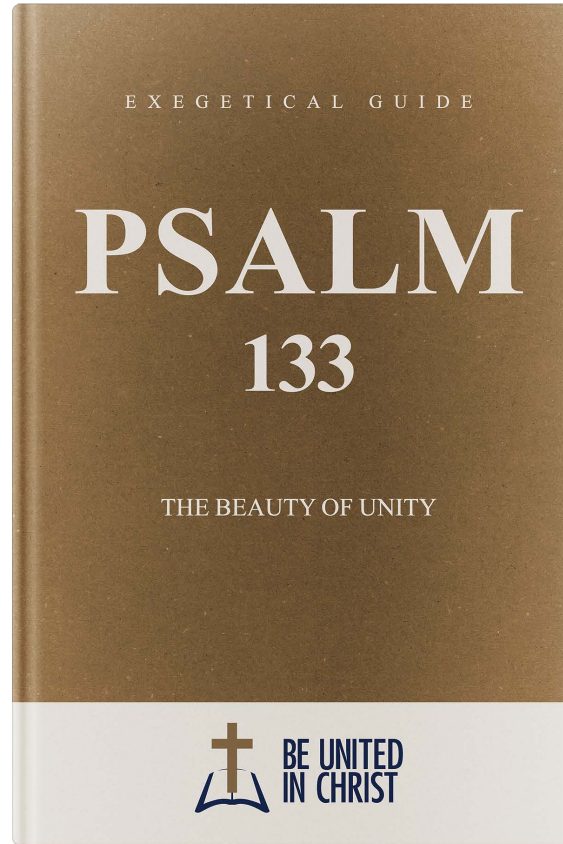




# DEVELOP A RICH CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

Blessing. Peace. Eternal life. How can you experience them for yourself? Explore *Psalm 133* and learn King David's song of the goodness and pleasantness of God's children living in harmony. You will discover that unity is not only God's desire but also His design to lead you into the satisfying life He desires for you to experience.

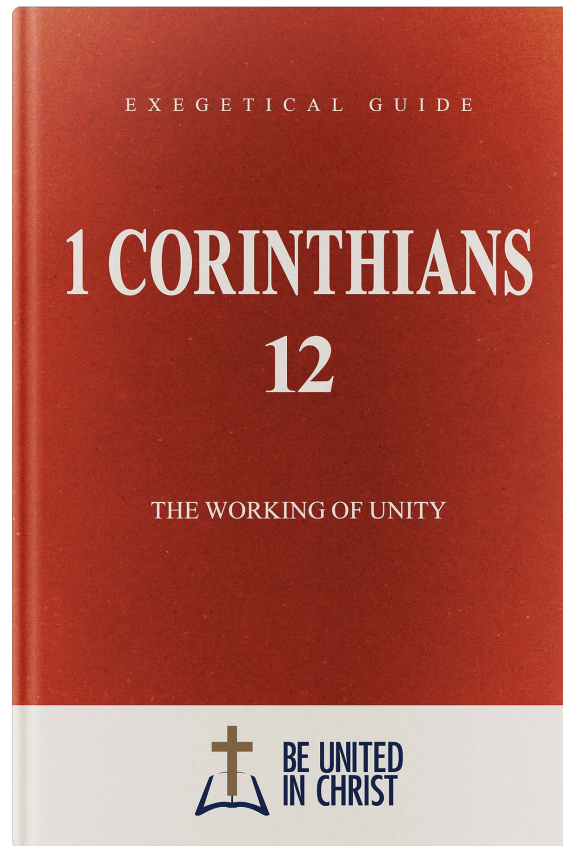
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# UNCOVER YOUR PURPOSE IN GOD'S PLAN.

All of us want to belong, to feel connected, to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. For the Christian, these desires find their fulfillment in Christ and in the life He has designed for His church. The *1 Corinthians 12* Exegetical Guide will show you how God intends to fulfill your deep need to belong. You have a reserved position in His plan. You have a unique place, and you have a vital role.

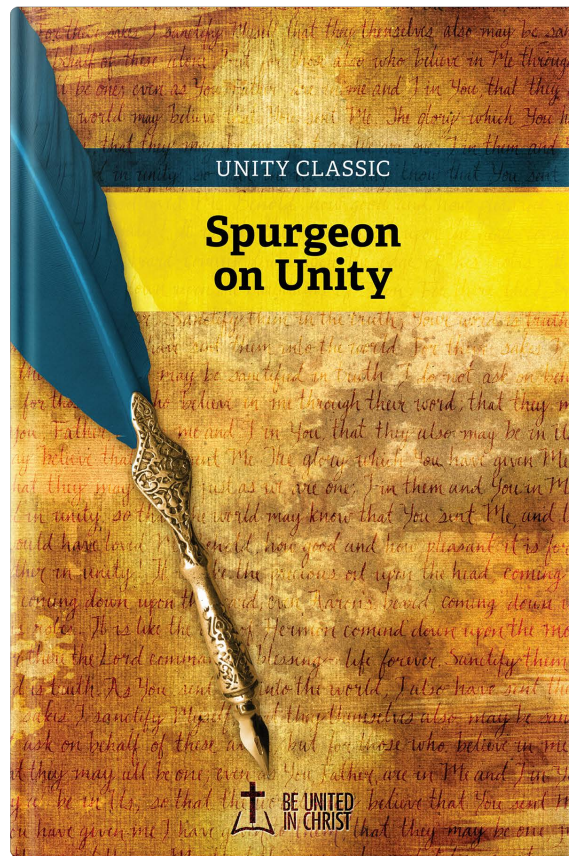
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