

The Passion  
and Prayer  
of the Lord  
Jesus Christ

# ONE

HOLY  
BIBLE

# ONE: The Passion and Prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ

*Published by Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry*

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# Introduction

Paradigms shift when we see old facts in a new way. We're watching a movie, and then a surprise ending shifts our frame of reference and makes us reinterpret what we've seen. We puzzle over a riddle until the answer makes the solution obvious. The end of a mystery novel reveals a clue that was there all along, but until the author pointed it out to us, we had everything wrong.

This book was written to change the way you view God, yourself, sin, salvation, the church, and eternity by pointing out a Biblical truth that has generally gone unnoticed. It highlights a neglected feature of God's purposes for His people, to make you reexamine how you think about and live out your faith. It examines and connects familiar passages in fresh ways to reveal priorities and patterns that are central in Scripture but peripheral for most believers.

The truth is this: *unity is crucially important to God*. The Lord made and redeemed you to live in harmony with Him, His people, and His world. This is why He created the heavens and the earth and made Adam and Eve in His image. This is why He called Abraham out of Ur, Israel out of Egypt, and David out of Bethlehem and entered into covenants with them. Unity is also why God promised the new covenant, sent His Son and Spirit, and will create the new heavens and earth.

God, who is love, made us to enjoy and express the diverse, loving unity of the Trinity. When our sin separated us from God, He sent His Son to reconcile us. Now we are called to share the gospel of reconciliation with others by demonstrating a union with Jesus and His disciples that compels unbelievers to come to Christ. One day we will live in the presence of God Himself in resurrected bodies on a renewed earth, enjoying and expressing the intimate love and eternal union of the Trinity.

This perspective helps us understand Jesus' final public prayer for His disciples.

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:20–26)

The Son who is eternally one with the Father unites us with the Father and one another by uniting us to Himself. By exhibiting our oneness, we persuade the world that Jesus really did come from God, which convinces others to commit themselves to Christ and His church. This continues until Christ returns and we all live in loving unity forever.

The theme of loving unity is also clear from the three great love commandments in Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Matthew 22:37–39)



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The background is a textured, light brown surface. It features several overlapping geometric shapes: a large rectangle on the left, a smaller rectangle in the upper center, and a large trapezoidal shape on the right. Diagonal lines, some solid and some dashed, are drawn across the composition, creating a sense of depth and movement. The word "Prologue" is centered in a black, serif font.

# Prologue

The silver trumpets sounded brightly as the sun set over Jerusalem, signaling the beginning of Passover. In an upper room somewhere in the city, Jesus reclined around a table with His disciples to commemorate, and anticipate, God's deliverance of His people through the sacrifice of a lamb. Knowing He would die the next day, Jesus chose to spend the evening with His disciples rather than with His family. There was little time to prepare the Twelve for His departure.

Tragically, the disciples chose this occasion to resume an old debate. "There arose also a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be greatest" (Luke 22:24). They'd had this argument a year earlier and even the week before, and now they were at it again.<sup>1</sup> Possibly the debate began as the disciples sought the places of honor at the table, an act of pride that Jesus had warned them against.<sup>2</sup> Just a few days before, in fact, Christ cautioned them not to seek places of honor as the scribes and Pharisees did, for God humbles those who exalt themselves.<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the case, the disciples were arguing again. They were divided when they should have been united and at a time when they sorely needed to stick together. So Christ corrected them once again.

The one who is the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like the servant. For who is greater, the one who reclines at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who reclines at the table? But I am among you as the one who serves. (Luke 22:26–27)

The Lord then reinforced His instruction with a shocking, unforgettable act of service.<sup>4</sup>

## **A Shocking Act**

During supper Jesus rose from the table, laid aside His outer garments, and wrapped a cloth around Himself. The creator of the universe took on the garb of a servant to perform a task so lowly that even Jewish servants could refuse it. Pouring water into a pitcher and taking a basin, He knelt before a disciple and washed one foot and then the other. Jesus dried his feet with the cloth round His waist and moved on to the next disciple.

It took a while for Jesus to make His way around the table. Perhaps the basin had to be emptied and the pitcher refilled. By the time the awkward episode was over, each disciple had been personally touched and served by the Lord—even Judas, who betrayed Christ with clean feet. When Jesus returned to His place, only one person's feet remained unwashed: His own.

Afterward, Jesus explained His action.

Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (John 13:12–15)

Jesus served His disciples to model how they should serve each other. The greatest man in the world (and they did not yet grasp how divinely great) humbled Himself to perform the lowliest task. The disciples' divisive debate over their greatness was over. It was time to be humble and serve. It was time to love.



**Note: some pages are omitted from this book preview.**



# 1

## God

You believe that God is one.

You do well.

James 2:19



The Lord alone is God, but He does not exist alone. There is a threeness to God's oneness, a glorious diversity to His unity, which He intends His creation to enjoy and reflect. The one God is a Trinity of three distinct persons who coexist in perfect order, harmony, and love. The order of the universe reflects the order within the Trinity. The interpersonal harmony of God's people should echo the harmony between the three divine persons. The love we experience and express is a blessed extension of the love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Diverse, ordered, harmonious, loving unity is grounded in God and given by God. Therefore any understanding, enjoyment, or restoration of true Christian unity must begin with the triune God.

### **The One God Is Three Persons**

There is only one God: Yahweh, the Lord.<sup>1</sup> He is the God who presented Himself to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. He is

- the eternal God, “who is and who was and who is to come” (Revelation 1:4);
- the almighty God who created, sustains, and rules the heavens and the earth;
- the personal God who made mankind in His image;
- the holy God who evicted Adam and Eve from Eden;
- the gracious God who made a covenant with Israel and the faithful God who delivered His people from Egypt;
- the loving God who sent His Son to seek and save the lost;
- the just God who will judge the world and separate the saved and unsaved into Heaven and Hell.

The God of the Bible is the only God, and He has revealed Himself not only in Scripture but also in history, especially the history of Israel. The Lord is God, and there is no other.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Three Are One***

The one God who presented Himself to Israel also revealed Himself as Jesus Christ. He, too, is called *God* and *Yahweh*, and He performed divine acts, such as commanding seas, forgiving sins, and giving eternal life.<sup>3</sup> Jesus of Nazareth truly was *Immanuel*, “God with us” (Matthew 1:23).<sup>4</sup> The Father compels us to worship His Son, and angels worship Father and Son alike.<sup>5</sup> At Jesus’ baptism the Father announced from Heaven, “You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased” (Luke 3:22). At Christ’s transfiguration He declared, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” (Luke 9:35). Jesus came from the Father, and when He completed His work on earth, He returned to Him.<sup>6</sup> God is both the Father and the Son, yet there is only one God.<sup>7</sup>

The one God who is the Father and the Son is also God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, too, possesses attributes that belong to God alone. He is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, and everywhere present, including in the throne room of Heaven.<sup>8</sup> He is called the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ, for He shares their character and nature. He knows the mind of the unknowable God, for He Himself is God who comprehends the incomprehensible.<sup>9</sup> The Spirit creates and gives life, and He restores the dead to life.<sup>10</sup> The Spirit is no mere force or liquid; He is a distinct person like the Father and the Son. He acts in personal ways: He helps, teaches, testifies, speaks, prays, knows, grieves, directs, and distributes spiritual gifts.<sup>11</sup> So the Holy Spirit is God while the Father and the Son are also God, yet there is only one God.

## ***One Is Three***

The Gospels mention the three persons of God together on several occasions. When the angel Gabriel announced Jesus' birth to Mary, he said, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). At Jesus' baptism the Spirit descended on Christ as the Father proudly endorsed His Son.<sup>12</sup> When Christ's disciples returned to report on their ministry journeys, Jesus "rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, 'I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth'" (Luke 10:21). Jesus later commissioned His followers to baptize new disciples "in the *name* [singular] of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19, emphasis added).

The epistles confirm what the Gospels reveal. Peter said that saints are chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood" (1 Peter 1:2).<sup>13</sup> Paul told the Galatians, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6). He wished the Corinthians "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit" (2 Corinthians 13:14). He urged the Ephesians to diligently preserve their unity, for there is one Spirit, one Lord, and one God and Father of all.<sup>14</sup> The church's unity is grounded in the tri-unity of God.

So the Bible teaches that the one God eternally exists as three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—each of whom is fully God, yet there is only one God.<sup>15</sup> This truth is called the Trinity, and the true church has proudly confessed it throughout its history.<sup>16</sup>



**Note: some pages are omitted from this book preview.**

have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:20–26)

Here is God's intent for His children: to be one like God and with God, experiencing and expressing God's love forever.

And so God chose to create rather than exist alone. He made a world that displayed His diverse unity and provided an environment to have a relationship with those who bear His image. The Creator first formed and then filled the creation to coexist in perfect harmony—all one as God is one.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> God revealed His “memorial name” to Moses at the burning bush.

Then Moses said to God, “Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you.’ Now they may say to me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God, furthermore, said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.” (Exodus 3:13–15)

In English this Hebrew name (יהוה) is transliterated as *YHWH* and often spelled “Yahweh” to aid pronunciation. This is the most common name for God in Scripture (used 5,321 times, plus another fifty occurrences of the shortened form *yāh* [יהי]). English Bibles render this “Lord,” often in small caps (LORD), because the Jews considered this name too holy to pronounce and would say “Lord” (*adonai*) when the text read *YHWH*.

- <sup>2</sup> Exodus 8:10; 9:14; Deuteronomy 4:35, 39; 1 Kings 8:60; Psalm 86:8; Isaiah 45:5–6, 14, 18, 21–22; 46:9; 1 Corinthians 8:4.
- <sup>3</sup> Jesus is clearly called God in John 1:1 and 20:28 and very probably in John 1:18, Romans 9:5, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 1:8, and 2 Peter 1:1. See Murray J. Harris’ *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008) and Brian Wright’s “Jesus as ΘΕΟΣ: A Textual Examination” in *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic, and*



*Apocryphal Evidence*, ed. Daniel B. Wallace (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011). Jesus is identified as *YHWH* in Matthew 3:3 (Isaiah 40:3), Luke 1:76 (Malachi 3:1), 2:11, Romans 10:13 (Joel 2:32), and Hebrews 1:10–12 (Psalm 102:25–27). Christ calls Himself *YHWH* in Matthew 22:44 (Psalm 110:1) and John 8:58 (Exodus 3:14).

What makes these New Testament verses so striking is that they take Old Testament references to *YHWH* and apply them to Jesus. For Jesus' controlling of seas, see Matthew 8:23–27 (Psalm 89:9; 107:29); forgiving of sins, see Mark 2:5–7 (Isaiah 43:25); and giving of eternal life, see John 4:14; 10:28; 17:3.

- <sup>4</sup> See also Isaiah 8:10.
- <sup>5</sup> Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 1:6; Revelation 5:12–13.
- <sup>6</sup> John 7:33; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 10, 17, 28; 20:17.
- <sup>7</sup> John 5:17–19.
- <sup>8</sup> Luke 1:35; 1 Corinthians 2:10–11; Hebrews 9:14; Psalm 139:7–10; Revelation 1:4; 4:5.
- <sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10–11.
- <sup>10</sup> Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30; Ezekiel 37:7–10.
- <sup>11</sup> John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:13; Acts 16:6–7; Romans 8:9, 14, 26–27; 1 Corinthians 2:11; 12:11; Ephesians 4:30; 1 Peter 1:11; 1 John 4:2.
- <sup>12</sup> Matthew 3:15–17.
- <sup>13</sup> Jude also told believers to build themselves up in their holy faith by “praying in the Holy Spirit” and keeping themselves “in the love of God” while they waited “for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life” (Jude 1:20–21).
- <sup>14</sup> Ephesians 4:4–6.
- <sup>15</sup> G. K. Chesterton contrasts Christian Trinitarian monotheism with Islamic monotheism.

The complex God of the Athanasian Creed may be an enigma for the intellect; but He is far less likely to gather the mystery and cruelty of a Sultan than the lonely god of Omar or Mahomet. The god who is a mere awful unity is not only a king but an Eastern king. The heart of humanity, especially of European humanity, is certainly much more satisfied by the strange hints and symbols that gather round the Trinitarian idea, the image of a council at which mercy pleads as well as justice, the conception of a sort of liberty and variety existing even in the inmost chamber of the world. For Western religion has always felt keenly the idea “it is not well for man to be alone.” The social instinct asserted itself everywhere as when the Eastern idea of hermits was practically expelled by the Western idea of monks. So even asceticism became brotherly; and the Trappist [monks] were sociable even when they were silent. If this love of a living complexity be our test, it is certainly healthier to have the Trinitarian religion than the Unitarian. For to us Trinitarians (if I

may say it with reverence)—to us God Himself is a society. It is indeed a fathomless mystery of theology, and even if I were theologian enough to deal with it directly, it would not be relevant to do so here. Suffice it to say here that this triple enigma is as comforting as wine and open as an English fireside; that this thing that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart: but out of the desert, from the dry places and the dreadful suns, come the cruel children of the lonely God; the real Unitarians who with scimitar in hand have laid waste the world. For it is not well for God to be alone. (G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* [New York, NY: John Lane, 1909], 250–252)

- <sup>16</sup> The Trinity is professed by the church’s councils, confessed by its creeds, taught in its catechisms, sung in its hymns, and celebrated in its ordinances. The chief theologians of both the Western and Eastern Church are united in their belief that the one God exists as three distinct, divine persons. For example, Saint Augustine in the West taught that “the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and each of these by Himself, is God, and at the same time they are all one God” (*On Christian Doctrine*, 1.5). The Eastern father Gregory of Nazianzus explained, “When I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” (*Orations* 38.8).

Helpful books on the Trinity include Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005); Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity: An Introduction to the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012); and, Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2017).

- <sup>17</sup> John M. Frame has compiled 112 of these in appendix A of *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 2 of *A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002), 743–750. Peter J. Leithart suggests eight “perichoretic” echoes of divine “reciprocal penetration” in *Traces of the Trinity: Signs of God in Creation and Human Experience* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2015).

- <sup>18</sup> See also John 1:3, 10; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Hebrews 1:2.

- <sup>19</sup> Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30.

- <sup>20</sup> Genesis 2:7; 1 Samuel 2:6; Job 34:14–15; Psalm 104:1–35; John 1:4; 5:21; Acts 17:23–28; 1 Timothy 6:13; Hebrews 1:3.

- <sup>21</sup> What G. K. Chesterton calls “the council, eldest of things that are, the talk of the Three in One” (G. K. Chesterton, *The Ballad of the White Horse* [New York, NY: John Lane, 1911], 12).

- <sup>22</sup> Genesis 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:8.

- <sup>23</sup> Genesis 3:15.

- <sup>24</sup> Galatians 4:4–7.

- <sup>25</sup> Luke 1:5–20, 26–55; 2:8–14, 21–38.

- <sup>26</sup> This passage quotes from Isaiah 61:1–2 and 58:6.

- <sup>27</sup> Isaiah 11:1–2.

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- <sup>28</sup> Hebrews 9:14.
- <sup>29</sup> Acts 2:24; Romans 8:11; 10:9; Galatians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 4:14.
- <sup>30</sup> Theologians call God the Father, the Son, and the Spirit “in action” the “economic” Trinity and their eternal being apart from their activities the “immanent” or “ontological” Trinity. A foundational axiom of Trinitarian theology is that the “economic Trinity” reveals the “immanent/ontological Trinity.” That is, what the Trinity does reveals important truths about who the Trinity is.
- <sup>31</sup> Romans 3:26.
- <sup>32</sup> John 10:38; 14:10–11, 20; 17:20–22. The technical theological terms for the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity are *perichoresis* (from Greek) and *circumincession* (from Latin).
- <sup>33</sup> See Donald Fairbairn, *Life in the Trinity: An Introduction to Theology with the Help of the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).
- <sup>34</sup> See Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, & Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, & Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).
- <sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 3:23; 11:3.
- <sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:27.
- <sup>37</sup> Revelation 4–5.
- <sup>38</sup> Acts 10:38; Luke 10:21.
- <sup>39</sup> John 16:14; 13:31; 14:13; 17:1.
- <sup>40</sup> Evangelicals differ as to how the three persons of the Trinity relate, and specifically whether the Son is subordinate to the Father eternally or only during His incarnation. Both sides agree that the three persons of the Trinity are identical in nature and equal in status. They differ, though, on whether Scripture presents their roles as a hierarchy or a committee. Those who reject an eternal hierarchy within the Trinity include Gilbert Bilezikian, Millard Erickson, Kevin Giles, and Carl Truman. Those who affirm an eternal hierarchy include Wayne Grudem, Andrew Naselli, John Piper, and Bruce Ware. Advocates of both sides argue their positions in Dennis W. Jowers and H. Wayne House, *The New Evangelical Subordinationism?: Perspectives on the Equality of God the Father and God the Son* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012).
- <sup>41</sup> 1 John 4:8, 16. The association of love with a divine being is rarer than most people realize. Love was absent from pagan conceptions of god. Baal, Odin, and Zeus were mighty but not loving. Aphrodite was the Greek goddess of love but not the selfless, sacrificial love of Yahweh. The mythologies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Canaan, and Europe knew nothing of a god whose character was more praiseworthy than his power, or who was worth worshipping simply for who he was and not for what he could do for someone. The Islamic Hadith lists ninety-nine names of Allah, but “Love” is not among them. To assert “God is love” is uniquely Biblical.
- <sup>42</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:20.



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# 5

## Christ

God was in Christ reconciling  
the world to Himself.

2 Corinthians 5:19



“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased” (Luke 2:14). So the heralding angels announced the birth of Jesus, praising God for sending His Son to restore the peace that sin had shattered.<sup>1</sup> God became a man to heal the breach that humanity had caused but could not seal. The Creator became the Redeemer to save the world from sin.

Restoring unity was more costly than creating it.<sup>2</sup> For Christ to deliver us from Satan and redeem us from sin required incarnation and crucifixion, death and resurrection. There were tears to spill and blood to shed, a grave to occupy and empty. Now Christ heads His church to fill His kingdom, sustaining creation until He renews it completely someday. This is how Paul describes our Lord’s reunification of the world:

He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in Heaven. (Colossians 1:13–20)

In this way Christ reconciles us to God and one another and one day will reconcile all things on earth and in Heaven.

## **Reconciliation**

Reconcile means “restore to friendship or harmony.”<sup>3</sup> This beautiful word indicates that a harmonious relationship had become hostile but was then restored.<sup>4</sup> This is why the gospel is called “the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19). God and man were in harmony, but our sin ruptured this relationship. So God sent His Son to remove sin and restore peace through His perfect life, atoning death, and bodily resurrection. When we embrace Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, He reconciles us to God.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Reconciled to God***

Christ reconciles sinners to God through His death on the cross.<sup>6</sup> His sacrifice removed the barriers sin inserted between us and God in order to “atone” for us, to make us “at one.”<sup>7</sup>

Our sin led to our *condemnation*, but Christ’s obedience resulted in our *justification*. Christ took the blame for our sin and gave us credit for His righteousness. God’s justice and holy wrath were satisfied, and we were justified, declared righteous. “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

Our sin *corrupted* our nature, but the Holy Spirit enables us to receive the gospel, causes us to be *born again*, makes us new creations in Christ, and then progressively conforms us to the image of Christ.<sup>8</sup> The Spirit applies the atonement to us.<sup>9</sup>

Our rejection of God resulted in *captivity*, but Jesus *redeems* us and *liberates* us from our bondage to sin and death. Christ conquered the

devil and is destroying his works and plundering his possessions.<sup>10</sup> In Christ we have overcome the evil one.<sup>11</sup>

Violating the law made us *cursed*, but Christ “redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:10, 13).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, Christ *reconciles* the conflicts caused by our sin. He heals our relationships with God and others, brings peace to our souls, and one day will reconcile our world as well.

Christ died to reunite us with God. Though we didn’t deserve it, because of Jesus we are at peace with God again. “While we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son,” so we “exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation” (Romans 5:10–11).

### ***Reconciled to One Another***

Christ died to reconcile us not only to God but also to one another. The apostle Paul explains in Ephesians 2:11–22 that Christian unity is an explicit purpose and achievement of the cross.<sup>13</sup> Before Christ, Gentiles were excluded from Israel’s community, covenants, and Messiah and were therefore Godless and hopeless.<sup>14</sup> But at the cross Christ removed the barrier of the Mosaic Law that separated Jews and Gentiles and formed them into one new man, the church.

He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:14–16)



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# 9

Be United  
in Christ



Thus far unity has been discussed *theologically*. The triune God created the world to reflect His unified diversity and made humankind to express the loving oneness of the Trinity. When we violated God's will, we disrupted the harmony of God's works, for our sin separated what God joined together. So God sent His Son to reconcile us through the cross, and this reconciliation is applied through the Spirit and manifested in the church until it is enjoyed eternally in God's presence.

In the following chapters, unity will be treated *practically*. They discuss how our common faith unites us with Christ and one another, but only in accordance with God's truth. As we grow in interpersonal love by growing in personal holiness, we must pursue a reconciliation lifestyle that diligently preserves the unity of the Spirit under the guidance of godly leaders. In these ways we labor together to display and protect the unity that we have in Christ.

God's will for Christian unity is also revealed *historically* through the narrative of Scripture. From its opening "In the beginning" to its concluding "Amen," the Bible tells the story of unity established, shattered, and restored. It relates human history from Adam to the second coming of the second Adam, Jesus, who fulfills God's covenants with Abraham and David. It describes how the good news of reconciliation in Christ goes out to the ends of the earth until the Lord descends and dwells with us forever. This present chapter bridges the theology and practice of unity by highlighting how each stage of redemption history and each section of Scripture indicates God's intention for us to coexist in harmony with our Creator and His creation. From Genesis to Revelation, God's Word reminds us that we were made to live in unity with God and one another.<sup>1</sup>

## **Unity Established**

Before God created, He loved. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always loved and delighted in one another, and they could have continued to coexist alone in perfect unity, intimate fellowship, and unbroken communion forever. But in love God chose to create others to enjoy and express the loving oneness of the Trinity.

So “God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). He formed a home for humanity by separating light from dark, earth from sky, and land from sea. Then He filled it with plants and trees, fish and birds, insects and animals. There was unity with diversity, a universe where everything was precisely ordered and orchestrated. The earth was ready for its stewards.

So “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:27). The Lord formed Adam and then Eve, uniting them as husband and wife and blessing them so they could multiply and fill and rule the earth. The plan was for their children to marry and form loving families of their own, and these families would form righteous and just communities who would gladly serve the Lord together. Eventually Eden would extend until all the earth became a temple in which God would dwell with His people.<sup>2</sup>

The world as God intended would be holy and harmonious. Everything would thrive and flourish. Everyone would be healthy, happy, and fulfilled in the place and role God assigned them. Everyone would love the Lord with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength and love their neighbors as themselves. There would be perfect peace and unity, for everyone would fully reflect the glorious unity of the Trinity.

## Unity Shattered

Paradise was lost, however, when a rebellious angel deceived Eve into disobeying God, and then she tempted her husband to do the same. The couple felt shame and fear for the first time, turned on one another, and hid from their Creator. Adam's sin shattered mankind's peace within themselves, with each other, and with their God. Their Maker became their Judge.

The Lord cursed the serpent and the earth, made labor painful for men and women, and ejected the sinners from His holy presence. Outside Eden, Adam and Eve struggled to survive in a world characterized by conflict. Eventually their bodies died and turned to dust, for when the father of the human race sinned, he doomed himself and his posterity to death.<sup>3</sup>

Adam's descendants inherited his sin nature, and each generation turned more evil and more vicious. Cain killed Abel, then men boasted of murder, and by the time of Noah the earth was "corrupt" and "filled with violence."<sup>4</sup> God had made man innocent, but now "every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5–6). Grieved, the Lord regretted making man and flooded the earth to start afresh with Noah's family.<sup>5</sup> But sin and conflict soon reappeared when Noah acted shamefully, and his son Ham shamed him publicly.<sup>6</sup> Their descendants proudly and defiantly built a lofty tower and, as judgment, God divided and scattered them.<sup>7</sup>

Time and again mankind proved that they would never stop defying God and wronging others.<sup>8</sup> The Lord could have justly executed a final judgment, ended human history, and returned to enjoying the perfect harmony of the Trinity. Instead, He mercifully implemented a plan to restore unity in a way that would not compromise His holiness.



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the angels who rebelled against Him and the fallen humans who refuse to accept Him, will be defeated, judged, and sentenced to suffer eternally in the lake of fire. God's children, those who were saved by grace through faith because of Christ, will be glorified, judged, and welcomed into the new Heaven and earth. God will dwell personally and permanently with saints who are no longer sinful but holy in a world that is no longer cursed but blessed.

In the end, God will still live in perfect unity. Father, Son, and Spirit will coexist in harmony, fellowship, and love, endlessly delighting in each other every moment. Every thought and sentiment will be shared, for they are always of one mind and heart in everything. Thus Father, Son, and Spirit will be in joyful agreement when they celebrate their glorious accomplishment of creating and redeeming others to enjoy and express the loving unity of the Trinity.

In that day the prayer of Jesus outside Gethsemane will be fully answered.<sup>93</sup> His disciples will be perfected in unity.<sup>94</sup> Everyone that the Father gave to the Son will be with Him, beholding the Savior's glory and experiencing the Father's love.<sup>95</sup> In the glorious presence of God, who is love, there will be perfect loving unity forever. Until that day, Christ commands His church to be one in faith, truth, love, and holiness, practicing a reconciliation lifestyle under His appointed leaders. Until we are with Christ, we must labor together to be united in Christ.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The following survey indicates some of the instances and ways in which the theme of unity runs through Scripture. It is suggestive, not exhaustive, and devotes more space to the Old Testament than the New since the preceding and following chapters cover the New Testament material fairly thoroughly.
- <sup>2</sup> G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study*

of *God's Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12, 15–17; 1 Corinthians 15:21–22.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 4:8, 23–24; 6:11.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 6:6–7.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 9:20–27.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 11:4, 8. “They said, ‘Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top will reach into heaven, and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth’” (11:4). The builders arrogantly undertook this project for themselves and their own glory, proudly presumed they could reach heaven through their efforts, and defiantly resisted God’s command to populate and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1, 7).

<sup>8</sup> “Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth” (Genesis 6:11–12).

<sup>9</sup> See James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). For a summary of the author’s argument, see “The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57.1 (2006): 57–84.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 3:21.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 4:25–26.

<sup>12</sup> Genesis 3:15.

<sup>13</sup> Genesis 8:21–22; 9:9–17.

<sup>14</sup> Genesis 9:5–6. See also James 3:9.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 12:1–3, 7 (see also Genesis 13:14–17; 15:1–21; 17:1–21; 18:17–33; 21:12–13; 22:1–18). God anticipates the call of Abraham by selecting the line of Shem to mediate His blessings to Noah’s other sons and their descendants (Genesis 9:26–27; see also 10:21–31; 11:10–32).

<sup>16</sup> Romans 4:3, 20–22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23.

<sup>17</sup> Genesis 22:1–10.

<sup>18</sup> Genesis 22:15–18. See also Genesis 12:3; 18:18; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Genesis 32:28.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 5:9.

<sup>21</sup> Genesis 13:1–14.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 14:1–16; 18:16–33.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham did have noteworthy relational lapses, however, such as his passive deferral to Sarah’s wishes regarding Hagar and Isaac and his deception of Abimelech (Genesis 16, 20, 21). Joseph is another prominent figure during the patriarchal period who modeled unity. His magnanimous forgiveness of his brothers and the intentional steps he took to restore their relationship are exemplary.



- <sup>24</sup> Job probably lived during the time of the patriarchs, as well. He remained loyal to God no matter his loss and demonstrated his faith by treating others with justice and compassion. Even before the Law was given at Sinai, God's people understood that loving God meant treating others lovingly (Job 29:11–17; 31:1–40). See also the condemnation of those who abuse and exploit others in chapter 24.
- <sup>25</sup> Genesis 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14; Acts 3:25; Galatians 3:8.
- <sup>26</sup> This population growth fulfilled God's promise to make Abraham "a great nation" (Genesis 12:2; 17:4–6; 18:18; 35:11; 46:3; Exodus 1:7, 10; Acts 7:17). When Israelites later came to make first fruit offerings, they were told to say, "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; but there he became a great, mighty and populous nation" (Deuteronomy 26:5–6).
- <sup>27</sup> Exodus 4:23; Luke 1:68–75.
- <sup>28</sup> The account of the ten plagues on Egypt is in Exodus 7–12.
- <sup>29</sup> Exodus 3:21–22; 11:2–3; 12:35–36; Psalm 105:37.
- <sup>30</sup> Exodus 3:13–15.
- <sup>31</sup> The journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai is recounted in Exodus 12:33–19:2.
- <sup>32</sup> Hosea 11:1; Jeremiah 2:2.
- <sup>33</sup> 1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 1:5; 5:32.
- <sup>34</sup> The Ten Commandments are listed in Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21. God stresses their significance by placing them first in the Mosaic Law, by speaking them directly to the whole nation, and by personally inscribing them, twice (Exodus 20:18–21; 24:12; 31:18; 32:15–16; 34:1, 4, 28–29; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22; 9:9–17; 10:1–5; 1 Kings 8:9; 2 Chronicles 5:10).
- <sup>35</sup> "It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of Mount Seir to Kadesh-barnea. In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them" (Deuteronomy 1:2–3).
- <sup>36</sup> Numbers 10:33–11:6, 10.
- <sup>37</sup> Numbers 12.
- <sup>38</sup> Numbers 13:1–14:10.
- <sup>39</sup> Numbers 14:26–38; 20:1–13, 24; 27:14; Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26–27.
- <sup>40</sup> The specific blessings and curses for obeying or disobeying God are described in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28.
- <sup>41</sup> Joshua 12:24.
- <sup>42</sup> Joshua 13–19.
- <sup>43</sup> Joshua 20:2. Six of the forty-eight Levitical cities were "cities of refuge" where people guilty of involuntary manslaughter could flee to avoid avenging family members (Joshua 21; see also Numbers 35:6–34; Deuteronomy 4:41–43; 19:1–11). This institution helped preserve peace and justice in Israel.
- <sup>44</sup> Joshua 22:22–29.

<sup>45</sup> Joshua 23–24; Judges 1:1–2:3.

<sup>46</sup> Judges 19–21.

<sup>47</sup> Ruth’s historical context is clearly stated in the opening verse: “Now it came about in the days when the judges governed, that there was a famine in the land.”

<sup>48</sup> Ruth 4:21–22; 1 Chronicles 2:11–12; Matthew 1:5; Luke 3:32.

<sup>49</sup> See also Deuteronomy 12:8; Proverbs 12:15; 21:2; 26:5; 26:12; 30:12.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Samuel 8:4–6.

<sup>51</sup> 1 Samuel 10:23–25; 14:24–46; 15:1–34.

<sup>52</sup> Sadly, David’s sins did much to harm and divide the nation as well. His adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah provoked God to bring violence to his house (2 Samuel 12:10). His refusal to judge Amnon and fully forgive Absalom led to his son’s rebellion against him (2 Samuel 13–19). David’s ordering of a census promoted a divine plague that killed thousands (2 Samuel 24). His proud anger almost drove him to slay Nabal, but Abigail intervened (1 Samuel 25). When David acted wisely and righteously, God used him in a great way to bless and unify the nation, but his folly and sin brought death and division to the people he was called to rule. Obedience edifies; disobedience destroys.

<sup>53</sup> 2 Samuel 6–7; 1 Chronicles 22:1–5.

<sup>54</sup> The Davidic Covenant was established in 2 Samuel 7:8–16 and fulfilled by Jesus Christ (see also 1 Chronicles 17:7–14). Compare, for example, 2 Samuel 7:16 with Luke 1:32–33, emphasis added:

Your *house* and your *kingdom* shall endure before Me forever; your *throne* shall be established forever.

The Lord God will give Him the *throne* of His father David; and He will reign over the *house* of Jacob forever, and His *kingdom* will have no end.

<sup>55</sup> See *Exegetical Guide Psalm 133: The Beauty of Unity* (Denton, TX: Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry, 2019), available at BeUnitedinChrist.com. Examples of unity themes in the psalms include delighting in one another, considering one another, and encouraging each other to worship and obey God (Psalm 16:3; 73:15; 95:1–11).

<sup>56</sup> Proverbs 6:19; 17:1, 14.

<sup>57</sup> Proverbs 6:19; 10:12; 13:10; 15:18; 18:6; 26:17, 21; 28:25; 29:22.

<sup>58</sup> Proverbs 17:14; 18:18; 20:3; 22:10.

<sup>59</sup> “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).

<sup>60</sup> 1 Kings 11:1–8.

<sup>61</sup> 1 Kings 11:9–40.

- <sup>62</sup> Scripture is crystal clear why God expelled and dispersed Israel from the land (2 Kings 17:6–18). In short, “This came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God” (v. 7).
- <sup>63</sup> 1 Kings 15:11; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:2; 14:3; 15:3, 34; 18:3; 22:2; 2 Chronicles 14:2; 20:32; 24:2; 25:2; 26:4, 5; 27:2; 29:2; 31:20; 34:2.
- <sup>64</sup> 2 Kings 17:19–23.
- <sup>65</sup> Leviticus 26:33; Deuteronomy 4:27; 28:64–65; Isaiah 1:2; 30:1, 9; Jeremiah 3:22; Ezekiel 23:3–21; Hosea 1:2; 2:5; 5:3.
- <sup>66</sup> Twelve of the seventeen books of prophecy were written before the exile. Seven of these were addressed to the southern kingdom of Judah (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Joel, Micah, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah), two to the northern kingdom of Israel (Hosea and Amos), two to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh (Jonah and Nahum), one to the descendants of Esau, the Edomites (Obadiah).
- <sup>67</sup> Isaiah 1:15; 50:1; 59:2.
- <sup>68</sup> Hosea 3:1; 11:1–12.
- <sup>69</sup> Ezra 4; Haggai 1.
- <sup>70</sup> Ezra 9; Nehemiah 5 and 13.
- <sup>71</sup> Malachi 1–2.
- <sup>72</sup> Jeremiah 31:31–34. See also Jeremiah 32:40; 33:14; Ezekiel 37:26; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 11:25; 2 Corinthians 3:6; Hebrews 8:8–12; 9:15; 10:16–17; 12:24.
- <sup>73</sup> Isaiah 52:13–53:12.
- <sup>74</sup> Isaiah 11:1–5; 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28–29.
- <sup>75</sup> Isaiah 11:6–9; 65:1–25; Revelation 21.
- <sup>76</sup> Isaiah 55:3–5; Jeremiah 30:9; Ezekiel 34:23–24; 37:24–28; Hosea 3:5; Luke 1:69; Acts 2:30; 13:23, 34.
- <sup>77</sup> Isaiah 2:4; 32:18; Hosea 2:18; Joel 3:10; Micah 4:3; Zechariah 9:10.
- <sup>78</sup> Isaiah 2:2; 25:7; 49:6, 22–23; 56:7; 60:3–12; Daniel 12:2; Zechariah 8:20–23; Revelation 21:24–26.
- <sup>79</sup> Zechariah 2:5, 10–11; 8:3.
- <sup>80</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:20; Colossians 2:16–17; Hebrews 8:5; 10:1.
- <sup>81</sup> Luke 24:27. Old Testament references to Christ include Genesis 3:15; 12:3; 49:9–12; Numbers 21:9; Deuteronomy 18:15; 2 Samuel 7:12–16; Isaiah 7:14; 9:1–7; 11:1–10; 42:1; 52:13–53:12; Daniel 7:13–14; Micah 5:2; Zechariah 9:9.
- <sup>82</sup> Matthew 22:37–40; Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–37; John 13:34–35; 15:12, 17.
- <sup>83</sup> Matthew 10:34–42; 19:27–30; 25:31–46; Mark 3:31–35; Luke 14:26.
- <sup>84</sup> John 5:30; Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:42; John 15:10.
- <sup>85</sup> John 17:20–26.
- <sup>86</sup> Luke indicates this in the sequel to his Gospel: “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). What Jesus

began to do and teach during the incarnation He continued to do and teach through His church.

<sup>87</sup> The four *marks* or *notes* of the church mentioned here (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) were originally confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 (commonly, but less accurately, called the Nicene Creed). In the sixteenth century Roman Catholics and Reformers both outlined distinguishing characteristics of a true church that unsurprisingly supported their own convictions and ecclesiological affiliation and excluded their opponents.<sup>2</sup> For Protestants the two fundamental marks of a true church are the accurate preaching of the Gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments. See, for example, article 7 of the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530) and John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.1.9.

<sup>88</sup> For example, the church in Philippi started with the converted households of a female fabric seller and a jailer, along with (possibly) an exploited slave girl who had recently been demon-possessed and some unidentified "brethren" (Acts 16:14–40).

<sup>89</sup> Acts 11:27–30; 15.

<sup>90</sup> Ephesians 2:20.

<sup>91</sup> Galatians 1:6–9; 1 Corinthians 15:3–11.

<sup>92</sup> John 14:26; 16:12–15; 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:2, 16.

<sup>93</sup> John 17:20–26.

<sup>94</sup> John 17:23.

<sup>95</sup> John 17:24, 26.



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# 12

## Love

The one who loves God should  
love his brother also.

1 John 4:21

God loves you. This is why He made you and sent His Son to save you. He demonstrated His love for you when His Son died for you, and He pours out His love for you in your heart through His Spirit.<sup>1</sup> Though you were His enemy, He reconciled and adopted you as His child.<sup>2</sup> Now nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ, and when you die you will live forever in the loving presence of God.<sup>3</sup>

God has loved you well, and He expects you to love well.<sup>4</sup> Your Lord calls you to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Your Creator calls you to love neighbors as yourself, even if they are enemies. Your Savior calls you to love other disciples as He loves you, and your Father calls you to love His other children because He loves you. Anyone who refuses to love is no child of His.

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. (1 John 4:20–5:1)<sup>5</sup>

God’s children love each other, which can be difficult. We are sinners, and sinners are hard to love and not very good at loving other Christians. But love is not optional. Believers are obligated to love one another just as He loved us. Our Father loved us so much that He sent and sacrificed His Son to satisfy His wrath for our sins.<sup>6</sup> “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

## **Loving God's Family**

The Bible calls Christians “brother” or “brethren” more than any other title.<sup>7</sup> This is more than a metaphor, for we who are in Christ are spiritual family in the Lord.<sup>8</sup> When we entrusted ourselves to Jesus Christ, God adopted us as His children, for “as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12). Therefore believers “are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” and fellow members of “the household of the faith” (Galatians 3:26; 6:10).

God decides who joins His family, and we must embrace whomever our Father adopts. If someone has God as their Father and Christ as their brother, if the Holy Spirit has caused them to be born again, then they are family whom we are to accept, love, and serve. We no more choose the members of our Christian family than we do our biological family, and in both there will be some relatives we find odd or challenging. Nevertheless, because we are family, we have a particular obligation to love one another.

Believers are to serve one another out of love and “do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 5:13; 6:10). Paul praises the Ephesians for their “love for all the saints,” and he commends the Thessalonians that the “love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater” (Ephesians 1:15; 2 Thessalonians 1:3).<sup>9</sup> The author of Hebrews urges, “Let love of the brethren continue,” and Peter writes, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22). We love other believers not because we like them but because they’re family.

## ***Loving as Family***

Viewing church as family can help guide our relationships with other believers. For example, Paul directed Timothy, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity” (1 Timothy 5:1–2). He likewise told Titus to instruct older women to live godly lives so they could teach and encourage younger women to be godlier women, wives, and mothers.

Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. (Titus 2:3–5)

The church is not a social club, or a service organization, or a political committee, or an advocacy group, or a networking opportunity, or a community center for the kids. The church is God’s household, and its members are family. Loving them as family means at least five things.

First, we love based on *identity*, not *inclination*. Some of our relatives we find admirable and others embarrassing, some delightful and others irritating, but we acknowledge and care for them because they’re family. Sometimes we like our siblings, sometimes not; but we stay involved in their lives and try to treat them well. In the same way, we do not always admire or enjoy all our Christian family, but we must accept and serve them. Sometimes we’re the ones embarrassing and irritating our siblings, and we’re grateful that they still love us. Brothers and sisters in Christ love each other because we’re related, not because we’re all lovely or always lovable.



# 15

## Leadership

Shepherd the flock of God  
among you.  
1 Peter 5:2



God's people need godly leaders the way sheep need good shepherds.<sup>1</sup> Moses asked, "Who will lead [Israel] out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have *no shepherd*" (Numbers 27:17, emphasis added). The prophet Zechariah complained that because of false prophets "the people wander like sheep" and "are afflicted, because there is *no shepherd*" (Zechariah 10:2, emphasis added).<sup>2</sup> Ezekiel devotes an entire chapter to denouncing Israel's self-serving shepherds and reporting God's intention to seek and regather His people, which He did by sending His Son.<sup>3</sup> Jesus saw Israel languishing under ungodly religious leaders and "felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep *without a shepherd*" (Matthew 9:36, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup>

The Good Shepherd laid down His life to rescue His sheep and gather them as "one flock with one shepherd" (John 10:16).<sup>5</sup> Christ, "the Shepherd and Guardian" of our souls, entrusts the care of His ransomed flock to church leaders (1 Peter 2:25).<sup>6</sup> As Peter instructed elders in Asia Minor, "Shepherd the flock of God which is among you" (1 Peter 5:2 NKJV). This concluding chapter considers the nature and exercise of godly leadership to promote and preserve unity in the church. It also examines how church members should support and submit to church leaders in submission to Christ. God's people must follow godly leaders for their communities to be unified.

## **The Nature of Godly Leadership**

Christians differ on which form of church government most closely conforms to Scripture, but all agree that pastors, priests, and other leaders must be godly.<sup>7</sup> Ungodly leaders are a primary source of division in the church. For God's people to be united, their leaders must be spiritual, faithful, intentional, humble, and servant-hearted.<sup>8</sup>

## *Spiritual*

Godly leadership is spiritual in two key respects. First, *the Holy Spirit must be prominent in the lives of leaders*.<sup>9</sup> They must walk by the Spirit so they don't commit the deeds of the flesh.<sup>10</sup> They must be filled by the Spirit to help the community be worshipful, grateful, reverent, servant-hearted, and submissive to one another.<sup>11</sup> They should not be reliant on their own wisdom or strength but must be Spirit-led and empowered, praying "at all times in the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:18).<sup>12</sup> Leaders must be spiritually mature in order to pursue and restore those ensnared by sin.<sup>13</sup> They must be well grounded in the gospel and God's Word so that they can "guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted" (2 Timothy 1:14).

The qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–10 emphasize character rather than charisma, status, wealth, or professional success. Leaders must be "above reproach" in every area of their lives and be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.<sup>14</sup> It takes time to identify and confirm these spiritual qualities, and churches that select leaders too quickly share culpability for their sins.<sup>15</sup>

Second, godly leaders are *primarily concerned with the spiritual welfare of God's people*. They yearn for the saints to grow in love for God, others, and one another. As parents delight to see their children love one another, so godly leaders delight to see their members enjoy genuine, loving fellowship with one another. Their greatest joy is to hear of their children walking in the truth, and they intentionally equip the saints to use their spiritual gifts to minister.<sup>16</sup> They aim their preaching, teaching, and ministries to transform hearts, which transforms behavior.<sup>17</sup> Criteria for

ministry success and church health are not based upon growth in church attendance or financial contributions, but growth in faith, hope, and love as well as holiness, faithfulness, and unity. Adding programs, expanding facilities, and increasing hits on the church website are hollow attainments if there is diminished evangelism, community, and involvement by the saints.

It is easy for church leaders to become distracted by attendance, finances, facilities, programs, or politics and lose sight of the spiritual condition of their flock.<sup>18</sup> The church is not a business to run, a club to organize, or a charity to operate. The church exists to glorify God by making disciples. It does so by preaching the gospel, teaching God's Word, and instructing believers to obey what Christ commanded.<sup>19</sup> Fostering love for one another in the context of expressing and promoting love for God enables the church to better love their neighbors, for their unity compels unbelievers to hear the gospel, believe in Jesus, and join His family.<sup>20</sup> This is the spiritual mission of the church, and it can be achieved only if its leaders are filled, led, empowered, and characterized by the Holy Spirit.

### ***Faithful***

Church leaders watch over the souls of church members “as those who will give an account” (Hebrews 13:17). Knowing that God holds them personally accountable should make leaders attentive, diligent, and prayerful. They are responsible for the spiritual welfare of those in their care and will individually answer for how faithfully they fulfill what their Lord assigned them.

Paul likens church leaders to head servants who are responsible for the provision, care, and direction of other servants. “Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards



**Note: some pages are omitted from this book preview.**

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For a Scriptural survey of this theme, see Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006). For insights into shepherding imagery from an actual shepherd, see W. Phillip Keller, *The Shepherd Trilogy: A Shepherd Looks at the 23rd Psalm / A Shepherd Looks at the Good Shepherd / A Shepherd Looks at the Lamb of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996).
- <sup>2</sup> Compare 1 Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16.
- <sup>3</sup> Ezekiel 34.
- <sup>4</sup> See also Mark 6:34.
- <sup>5</sup> See also Matthew 18:12–13; Luke 15:4–7; John 10:11.
- <sup>6</sup> See also Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 7:17. Practical resources on church leadership include Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine* (Youngstown, OH: Matthias Media, 2013); John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, updated and exp. ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2013); Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, rev. and exp. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: 2003); and Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective Shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2010). See also the numerous resources on all aspects of church leadership available at [9marks.org](http://9marks.org).
- <sup>7</sup> For introductions to the main options and issues, see Steven B. Cowan, ed., *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004) and Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, eds., *Perspectives on Church Government: 5 Views*, Perspectives (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2004).
- <sup>8</sup> Note, for example, the conflict and division caused by the sins of Israel's first five kings: Saul (1 Samuel 15:24–28; 28:17–18), David (2 Samuel 12:10; 13–20; 24), Solomon (1 Kings 11:9–40), Rehoboam and Jeroboam (1 Kings 12).
- <sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit has been explicitly associated with effective leadership since Israel left Mt. Sinai. When Moses complained that the burden of leading Israel was too great for him alone, God told him to gather seventy elders, for He would “take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put Him upon them” (Numbers 11:17; see vv. 10–18). The Lord later told Moses to select Joshua as his successor, for he was “a man in whom is the Spirit” (Numbers 27:18). The Spirit was identified with many of Israel's judges, kings, and prophets as well—for example, Othniel (Judges 3:9–10), Gideon (Judges 6:34), Jephthah (Judges 11:29), Samson (Judges 15:14), Saul (1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:14; 19:23), David (1 Samuel 16:13; Psalm 51:11), Elijah (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:15), and Elisha (2 Kings 2:15). When the church appointed deacons, the apostles instructed them to select men who were “full of the Spirit,” a description applied to Barnabas when he was sent to serve the church in Antioch (Acts 6:3; 11:22–24).

- <sup>10</sup> Galatians 5:16–25.
- <sup>11</sup> Ephesians 5:18–20.
- <sup>12</sup> See also Zechariah 4:6; Romans 8:14; Galatians 5:18; Jude 1:20.
- <sup>13</sup> Galatians 6:1.
- <sup>14</sup> Galatians 5:22–23; 1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6, 7.
- <sup>15</sup> 1 Timothy 5:22.
- <sup>16</sup> Ephesians 4:11–12; 3 John 1:4.
- <sup>17</sup> Proverbs 4:23; Matthew 12:34; 15:18–19; Mark 7:20–23; Luke 6:43–45.
- <sup>18</sup> Proverbs 27:23.
- <sup>19</sup> John 13:34–35.
- <sup>20</sup> John 17:21, 23.
- <sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:6–7.
- <sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:4–5.
- <sup>23</sup> For a classic exposition and application of this and other pastoral passages, see Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974).
- <sup>24</sup> Romans 12:8.
- <sup>25</sup> Galatians 2:11–21.
- <sup>26</sup> Galatians 2:14. See also 3:28.
- <sup>27</sup> Mark 10:35–37, 41.
- <sup>28</sup> Matthew 5:3–9.
- <sup>29</sup> Exodus 32:9–10.
- <sup>30</sup> Matthew 23:3–4.
- <sup>31</sup> Matthew 23:13–33.
- <sup>32</sup> See also 1 Corinthians 4:16; Philippians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 1:6.
- <sup>33</sup> 1 Peter 2:23.
- <sup>34</sup> Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18; 14:19; 2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; Hebrews 12:14.
- <sup>35</sup> John 13:1–18.
- <sup>36</sup> This was how Gregory the Great, one of the greatest and godliest bishops of Rome, described himself. For a summary of his classic guide to spiritual leaders, *The Book of Pastoral Rule*, see *Book Summary: The Book of Pastoral Rule* (Denton, TX: Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry, 2016), available at no cost at BeUnitedinChrist.com.
- <sup>37</sup> Acts 6:4.
- <sup>38</sup> Ezra 7:10.
- <sup>39</sup> Colossians 3:16.
- <sup>40</sup> Ephesians 4:15.
- <sup>41</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Timothy 2:25; Titus 1:13.



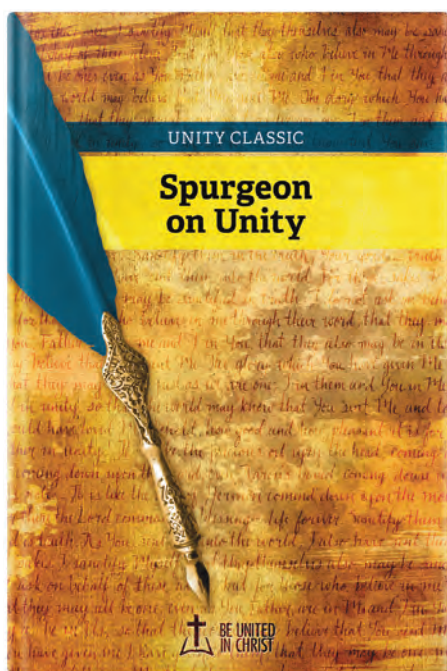
## ONE: The Passion and Prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ

- <sup>42</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16.
- <sup>43</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10–11; 11:18.
- <sup>44</sup> Genesis 3:1–6.
- <sup>45</sup> Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; Mark 13:22; 2 Corinthians 11:13, 26; Galatians 2:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 11; 2 Peter 2:1, 3.
- <sup>46</sup> Matthew 7:15.
- <sup>47</sup> Luke 22:32.
- <sup>48</sup> Luke 6:12–16; John 17:6–19, 20–26.
- <sup>49</sup> On Paul's prayers, see D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).
- <sup>50</sup> This phrase comes from Lynn Anderson's brilliantly titled book, *They Smell Like Sheep: Spiritual Leadership for the 21st Century* (Brentwood, TN: Howard Books, 2002).
- <sup>51</sup> The English Puritan John Owen (1616–1683) wrote a short, practical guide to how churches can serve their leaders and one another to become the gospel communities God wants them to be. See *Book Summary: Rules for Walking in Gospel Fellowship* (Denton, TX: Be United in Christ Outreach Ministry, 2016), available at no cost at [BeUnitedinChrist.com](http://BeUnitedinChrist.com).

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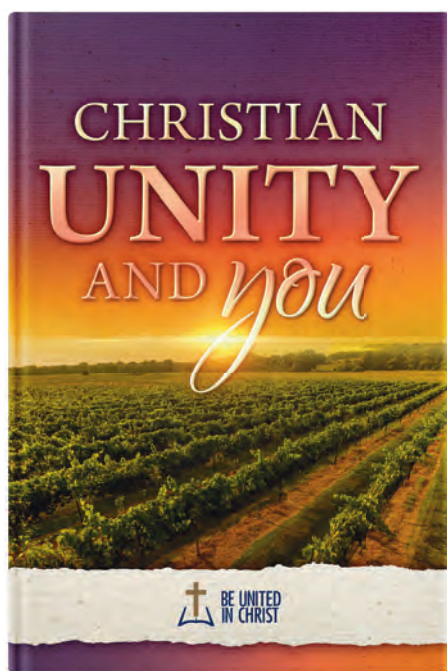
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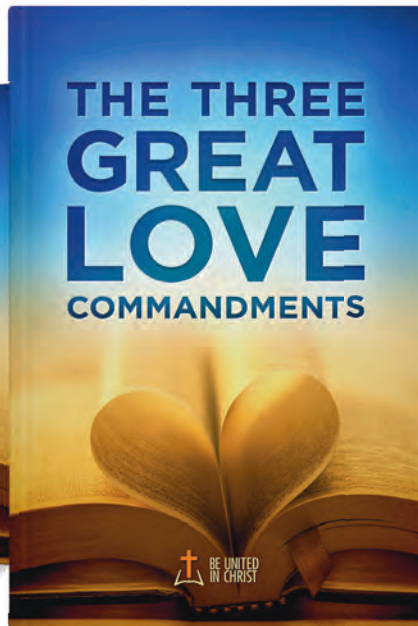
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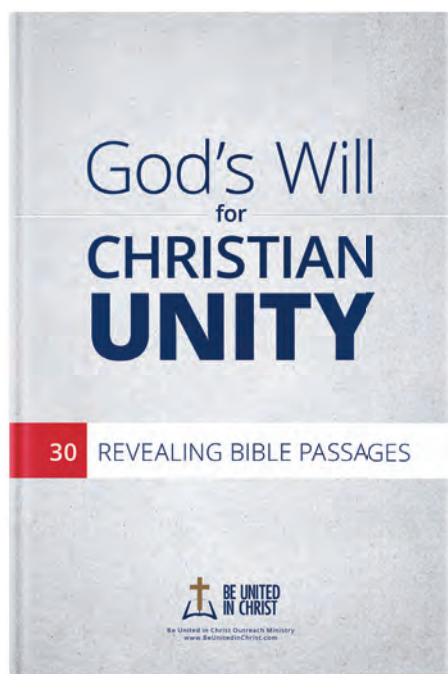
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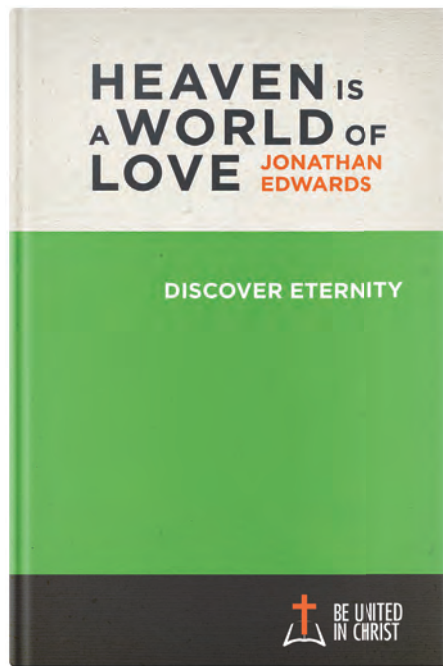
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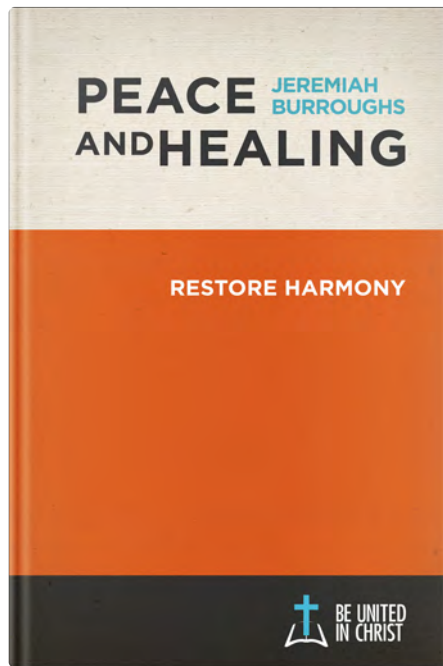




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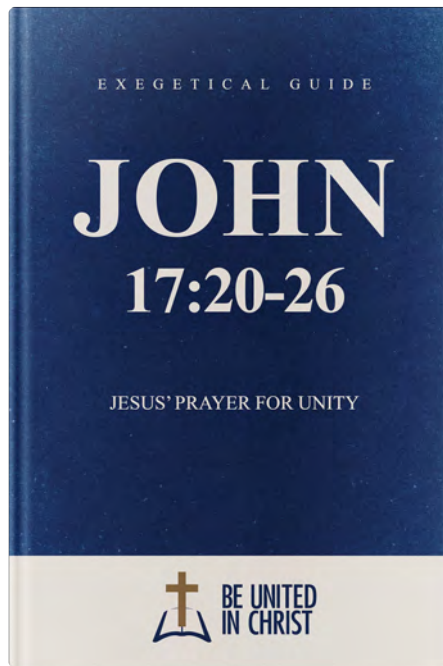
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