

Unity Over Division

I'm For It #2 - Pastor Stephen Combs - June 20, 2021 - Galatians 3:25-29

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new series this morning entitled, "I'm For It!" Over the next few weeks we hope to encourage you with the Word of God that the Gospel and the Lord Himself are characterized more for what they are for than what they are against.

Barna recently hosted a "State of the Church" event aimed at helping church leaders in specific cities understand what people think of the church in general. One of the key questions they asked was the question of perception. In this instance, the data from these cities tracked closely with national averages.

The number 1 feedback from this study, "41% say the church is known for the things they are against." When the unchurched believe the church to be against them, they will struggle to see themselves as a participant. This morning we will be addressing the idea that many believe the church is divisive and against unity, but in fact Christ and His church are for unity over division.

Need: Our culture has truly made diversity one of the highest pursuits for our society. One might argue that diversity has become its own god in our society. In its purest form, the idea of "diversity", has the meaning of different things coming together as one. However, most of what you will hear, see, read, and receive from this culture is a celebration and even a quest to be more and more different, to the point that coming together is increasingly more difficult. We hear people say, "Let's come together" and "Accept me the way that I am", yet, our differences are so strong—and beliefs at war with one another in many cases—that there is no common value to bring us together.

ILL: Coming together. There are all kinds of values that bring us together, yet separate us at the same time.



UNC vs Duke.



ChickFilA vs Popeyes.



Windows vs Mac.



Hebrew National vs Brightleaf. We naturally pick one team over the other, one food over the other, one technology over the other and rather than cheering for our love of sports, food, or technology, we put ourselves into "camps".

ILL: Platform. We all have a "platform" that gives us influence over a certain amount of people. The problem is that too many of us use this platform to divide rather than unify. It's one thing to form "camps" around what restaurant we think is best, but when we form a camp under the value of what race, culture, political party, gender, or anything other than "Christ-follower" is better, we draw a line in the sand that excludes people from being welcome in the church. We have to first of all acknowledge that God has given us influence and then realize that what we say about other races, cultures, lifestyles, genders, can either welcome them to "Come as you are and be forever changed by the love of Jesus" or "Stay away, change your mentality to be the same as mine, then you can be loved by Jesus."

Are you experiencing division in your life? It feels like there is less and less common ground with people. Some of us have seen close friends become distant because of differences of political, racial, or personal worldview that our society has drawn battle lines over. Many have seen the church as being divisive on these very battle lines because either the church picks sides or the church looks like a homogenous club that doesn't allow outsiders.

Society thinks diversity is their idea and message, yet they can't figure out how to bring people together without creating more division. However, diversity was God's idea first, and He gives us exactly what we need in order to come together: Jesus Christ.

Revelation 7:9-10 (NLT) I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!"

What a beautiful image and what brought them together? Worshipping God Almighty.

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Trans: What if there was simply a better way? That although God has created us with a great deal of variety, it is the ways He has made us one that better define us. What if we could experience both variety and unity?

BODY: In Galatians chapter 3, the apostle Paul taught the church of Galatia that because of their faith in Jesus Christ they were now one unified family; sons and daughters of King Jesus. Today we will learn how and why our faith in Jesus makes us one family through three reasons we see in our text.

TODAYS TEXT: Galatians 3:25-29 (ESV) ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Why Faith in Christ makes us one unified family: Because ...

1. We have a new inheritance.

EXP: (25-26) ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.

"Faith" - (πίστις, *pistis*) - conviction of truth or belief. Faith is at the foundation of all of these promises in Christ. It is our faith in Jesus that activates everything in the text here. This is the faith in the Gospel, the belief in Jesus as our sin atoning, resurrecting Savior.

"Guardian" - (παιδαγωγός, *paidagōgos*) - schoolmaster, instructor, tutor, teacher. The guardian that Paul had spent some time writing on before today's text was the law. The Jewish laws of Moses and the Torah had been a tutor but not a Savior. The law gave us the instruction and guidelines to follow in order to be holy, yet nobody could follow them perfectly. The law didn't save anyone, it just revealed how bad they needed saving.

"In Christ Jesus" - The faith has now come in Jesus now saving us from the penalties which the law could identify, but never save us from. "In Christ Jesus" is essential to our experiencing unity and family. The family of God has Christ as its cornerstone.

Ephesians 2:19-20 (NLT) You are citizens along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family. Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself.

"All sons of God" - (υἱός, *huios*) - Some translations make this children but that misses something that Paul was teaching and the primary point of this sentence. We have all been made "sons" in Christ. That speaks to inheritance. The firstborn son inherits all of his father's possessions. This is why Paul concludes this phrase in verse 29 with, "heirs according to promise."

ARG: A lot of people might say that this racial group was dealt a better hand or this socioeconomic group (they are getting an inheritance) but actually because of Adam's sin we were dealt the same bad hand. We were all once on the outside of the promise. But in Jesus we have been included:

Ephesians 2:11-13 (NLT) ¹¹ Don't forget that you Gentiles used to be outsiders. You were called "uncircumcised heathens" by the Jews, who were proud of their circumcision, even though it affected only their bodies and not their hearts. ¹² In those days you were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. ¹³ But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

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We have been given the inheritance of eternal life and the inheritance of faith which God is protecting on our behalf:

1 Peter 1:3-5 (ESV) ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

ILL:

Levites.  When the Israelites entered the Promised Land, God instructed them to claim land as an inheritance, based upon the size of their tribe. A large tribe, such as Manasseh, inherited a large amount of land, whereas a small tribe, such as Zebulun, inherited a small amount of land. In other words, the tribes that had been more fruitful inherited the larger amount of land. It could be easy to see how tribes might have been jealous of each other based upon the amount of land the other tribes inherited, for reasons that were likely beyond their control.

The tribe of Levi, on the other hand (the tribe set aside for the priesthood), received no land inheritance.

Deuteronomy 18:20 (ESV) And the Lord said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel."



The tribe of Levi was instead given cities inside of each land of the other tribes, in order to be able to minister to each tribe and have places to live. They lived off of the tithe (first fruits) of each tribe. Whether or not they had food to eat was not based upon how much they had sowed but was instead reliant on others.

In many ways I think the tribe of Levi got the better deal. Their inheritance kept their eyes off of a worldly inheritance and kept them set on the daily sustenance that God offered. God Himself was their inheritance, so what brought them together as a tribe was the work they did for the Lord.

Like the tribe of Levi, our inheritance as Christians is not one of this world. Our birth position on this earth has no impact on what we get for eternity. As a Christian, you don't begin your new life in Christ in a deficit or with unfair beginnings. As a "Son Of God" you are entitled to the same inheritance that everyone else has upon salvation.

There aren't some who come into new life in Christ already wearing crowns that others don't have. The only crowns given in heaven have nothing to do with earthly crowns. No those crowns mentioned in heaven are for those who "patiently endure testing and temptation and love Him" (James 1:12), those who "eagerly look forward to his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8), those who "care for the flock, watch over it willingly, are eager to serve God, and lead by good example" (1 Peter 5:2-4). So these crowns are not based on physical appearance or wealth, but how we handle the Gospel. Friend, how do you handle the Good News of Jesus?

APP:

You may have been dealt a difficult hand as far as your family's brokenness or growing up poor or in a tough neighborhood, etc ... But your eternal inheritance is not based on your culture, class, or gender, it is based on faith in Christ alone. What makes us one is greater than that which separates. Christ has called us to this one shared inheritance in Him.

So friend, see yourself in the light of your glorious riches in Christ Jesus not in the brokenness of your past. In this, see others as God's very creation, potential sons and daughters whom Christ died for, and potential heirs in God's kingdom.

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2. We have a new identity.

EXP: (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

“Baptized into Christ” - (βαπτίζω, *baptizō*) - to dip, to immerse, to submerge. Why baptized in Christ? Why not saved by or faith in? Well, this is Paul's only explicit mention of baptism in Galatians so it is no accident that baptism is used to close his greater argument that the people of God are no longer defined by the law but a new identity in Christ Jesus. What is the clearest ordinance given to the church to show that a believer has identified with Christ? Baptism!

“Baptism in the New Testament invariably implies radical personal commitment involving a decisive no to one's former way of life and an equally emphatic yes to Jesus Christ.” - Dr. Timothy George (NAC: Galatians, pg. 276)

“Put on Christ” - This is such a great progression after last week. We learned to put on the mind, love, and peace of Christ. Now Paul is summarizing all by saying put on Jesus, he likens Christ Himself to a garment. No longer describing Christ's attributes but Christ Himself, we are to put on the garment called Jesus.

Tim Keller (in his book *Galatians for You*, pg. 90) says this implies four amazing things:

1. Our primary identity is in Christ. Our clothing tells people who we are.
2. The closeness of our relationship to Christ. Your clothes are kept closer to you than any other possession.
3. The imitation of Christ. We dress like Him meaning we put on His virtues.
4. Our acceptability to God. If Christ is our clothing then we are His in God's sight.

ARG: We can feel unity with those who have the same skin color, feel unity over shared life experiences of poverty or wealth, but in Jesus there is a better unity. A unity in the garment of love, joy, peace, patience ... the garment of Jesus Himself. We are a new creation with a new identity:

2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

God has given us a new identity, He has identified us as His own:

Ephesians 1:13 (NLT) When you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

ILL: **Mosaic.** A mosaic is created by putting together many small colored pieces of material. In Hagia Sofia,

there is a mosaic of Jesus Christ that was created sometime in the 6th century.  Upon initial view

of the mosaic, it looks like a simple painting on the wall. But as you get closer,  and closer,  you find that it is actually thousands of tiny pieces—each one a different color and shape—coming together to create one beautiful image. Each piece is created uniquely and still contains its designed shape and color, but it comes together with the other pieces to create a new identity for itself. What makes us one in Christ encompasses what makes us different as individuals. God created you to be the color and shape that you are for a reason.

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Our sin is what causes us to cling stronger to our individual designs than the ultimate design that God intended for us. We create identities for ourselves that divide us and even separate us from God. In some cases, our weaknesses become the thing that we identify ourselves as. We identify ourselves by our addictions or preferences instead of our greater identity as Christians.

God is calling us to become something greater than our political, sexual, cultural, socioeconomic preferences. We are more than our skin, our socioeconomic upbringing, our gender, or more importantly, what we *feel* we are. We are more than what makes us different.

We should identify with the church because we identify with Christ. Inside, we may struggle to see who we are and can only see our differences, but when following Christ becomes our identifying value, our differences come together in unity.

APP: It's a messy business, but that's why we say, "**Come as you are and be forever changed by the love of Jesus.**" If people come as they are, they're going to come with junk that I don't agree with. They're going to have warring values and different preferences. They're going to have things that they called their "identity" before allowing Christ to become their identity. Yes, there are some things that Christ is going to have to change in us when we come to Him. It's not "Come as you are and stay the same, despite the love of Jesus." There are things about us that are sinful and not part of God's greater plan for us, so those things will have to change. Some aspects of our old identities will have to be let go of as we are "baptized" into Christ, while God keeps other aspects because it represents His vision for variety in the church.

And those who have already experienced life-change by the love of Christ must be welcoming to love one another as Christ loves them, even in our differences. Have you decided that your identity in Christ sits far above all others? Have you decided to wear the garment called Christ and identify first with Him and His people and share in the variety of God's Kingdom?

3. We have a new integrity.

EXP: (28-29) ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Why did I choose the word *integrity* here. When you hear integrity you probably think of honesty and strong ethics and that is one definition, but integrity also means the state of being whole and undivided.

ILL: We might say something has "lost its integrity" when dealing with certain natural resources like woods or metals. Rot, rust, wear or erosion will cause one of these resources to lose its integrity. A piece of armor for instance may lose its integrity after a damaging strike or many blows. To restore its integrity one must reconnect the broken pieces and tap out the dents. So this integrity is about the wholeness and strength. It is this integrity that Christ seeks for His creation, whole, strong and undivided. That's why he says we are different but all one in Jesus.

"All one" - God doesn't wish to abolish our backgrounds and cultures, rather, he wants to bring them together to worship and represent Him with variety in music style, clothing, language, thinking. God desires to bring every nation, tribe, and tongue into one joyful chorus.

"Jew nor Greek" - Cultural barrier. Race and upbringing are separating factors. The color of our skin often determines who we associate with, creating cultural differences. Paul is saying that every race and culture is accepted by God, therefore we should accept and include one another, no matter how different their color or culture may be.

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“Slave nor free” - Class barrier. Economic status is a separating factor. It affects where people live, where they go to school, what they eat, what they wear, etc. Paul is saying that our economic class should not separate us as a church. The poor must not be made inferior by the well-off and the well-off must not be resented or shunned by the poor.

“No male and female” - Gender barrier. In Paul's time, women were considered by society to be inferior to men. Even today, workplaces are accused of giving opportunities to men that are not offered to women. Paul is saying that men and women are equally loved and valuable to God. He's not saying that men and women should be identical in their roles, but rather that one role is not better than another.

“Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” - This is the climax of Paul's explanation. The question was whether those outside of Jewish heritage, Jewish custom and Mosaic law could be grafted into Abraham's line and receive all the promises of God. The answer is YES and not by those Jewish means but by faith in Christ. We are grafted in, God has made us whole and undivided.

ARG: Ephesians 2:14-16 (NLT) ¹⁴ For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. ¹⁵ He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups. ¹⁶ Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.



ILL: **Grafting.** There is a tree in my dad's yard that we love taking pictures in front of because of the beautiful blend of colors its leaves make, especially in the Fall. The tree is so unique because it is actually 2 different kinds of maple trees grafted together as one. My dad was concerned that one wouldn't survive without help from the other, so he grafted them together when he transplanted them. He was concerned that the plant would lose its integrity if planted alone, so he planted it in connection with another.

Like this maple tree, we were once separate, but Christ “transplanted” us, planting us together, grafting us together as one. The things that we used to trust in to keep us together, such as our gender, race, or culture, we now see pale in comparison to what God is creating by bringing us together in unity. Christ has given us a new integrity, meaning that He is what holds us together, both inwardly and in union with others.

Unfortunately, too many of us look like the briar patch that chokes out the lives of the plants around it instead of working with them to create something beautiful. Too many of us tear one another down because of our differences instead of “grafting” together as “heirs according to promise.”

John 15:5 (ESV) I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

Jesus invites us to “abide” or “remain in” Him. He has adopted us as “sons”, grafting us into the vine and when we produce fruit, it is so attractive to the world that they will all want to come and see it. Together, we are so much better and stronger than we were alone.

APP: God desires for us to have integrity as a people, that is to experience a community that is whole and undivided. That means we break down barriers that would divide us just as Christ has done, seeing that they cost us our integrity like a chink in our armor. Will you be grafted into the vine of Christ? Will you look past our differences and come together to create something beautiful and stronger?

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CONCLUSION: Our society is so divided, no matter how what we try in order to come together, because we are all too different. But, what if there was simply a better way?

ILL: Platform. Let's use our platform to send a message of unity over division. Let's let the Gospel message and our faith in Christ be the message that we send. Though God has created us with a great deal of variety, He has also made us one. We could experience both variety and unity. How do we become one unified family? By sharing in Christ's:

- Inheritance.
- Identity.
- Integrity.

Let's pray.