

Unique Unity

Avoiding Offending Believing Siblings

October 17, 2021



Today we're talking about unity. But not the *stamped-out, cookie-cutter* kind that's popular in this world and in cults, that's *uniformity*. We're talking about **the unique unity of distinctly different beings joining together, as in one body**, that's *harmony*. But before we address that first answer *this*:



Is God too merciful? *Well He's God! Of course not!*

But is that what you *truly* believe? Is that how you *act*? **Are you sure you don't want a little more fire and brimstone for your enemies?**

And wouldn't that get us all on the same page (*y'know, for God*), sooner? Shouldn't God just weed out the *others*? Do you *ever feel like that*? *Be honest.*

That's why Jonah fled instead of heading to Nineveh to warn the wicked. He admits it.



[God] had compassion and ... Jonah was greatly displeased ... "I *knew* that *You* are a *gracious* and *compassionate* God, *slow* to anger and abounding in *love*," – Jonah 3:10-4:2 NIV



That's gotta be the funniest "insult" in the Bible! But *Jonah* sure *understood* and *appreciated* God's mercy inside that *holy mackerel!* (Jonah 2) You see, **we get frustrated with God's merciful nature** (Ps 103:8) **... until we need it!** Still, we often desire to direct God's wrath. **We want to play God because God won't play favorites.** But, God *alone* can judge rightly; because, **God alone can see the truth beneath both sides of every story.**



For the Word of God ... judges the *thoughts* and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. – Hebrews 4:12-13 NIV



Know how He does it? **He's got someone on the inside... of you!** **Your conscience;** the pre-installed lie detector who reports the real reasons for doing what you did.

But when we judge someone's intentions, we presume to know their heart; and to judge their conscience. And assuming that kind of authority is nuts, because I don't know about you, but I struggle to understand my *OWN!* After all, as natural born sinners, we're experts at ignoring them!



And I know this, because I worked as a judge for *10 years* before I was disbarred. At the Brown Lantern Ale House. And nightly, I would have to judge people’s honesty, ability, and intentions to keep the peace and harmony in the bar and on the roads. But it was *guesswork* at best because, as a human myself, it’s always impossible to really know!

And just believing we have the authority to judge the conscience proves how unqualified we are! Because *that* couldn’t be more backward, it’s the *conscience* who’s given authority to judges us – as an impartial witness to the “*thoughts and attitudes of the heart*” in our case before God.

[Paul explains] They [in this case, Gentiles] show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their *conscience* also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts *accuse* or even *excuse* them. – Romans 2:15 ESV

Therefore, **it’s the conscience that matters in disputable matters.** *It* testifies about the posture of your heart, by sharing what you *thought* and what you *did*. While silencing *your* self-serving excuses, explanations, and extenuating circumstances.

So, if there’s a disputable matter that’s debatably allowable among believers – like having a drink ... at a bar ... say, The Brown Lantern, served by yours truly a few years ago – which *some* of you *have* – and *you* think the drink is prohibited, *you* can fall into sin in two ways regarding *others*: 1) **Condemning them** for doing what *they* believe is allowed; or 2) **Joining them** in violation of what *you* believe. Now, if you believe the drink is totally *allowed*, you can *also* fall into sin in two ways regarding *others*: 1) **Condescending them** as ignorant in what *they* believe; or 2) **Persuading them** to join *you* and *violate* what *they* believe. **This is because of what sin is.**

Remember, it is *sin* to know what you *ought* to *do* and then *not do it*. – James 4:17 NLT

But ... if you *do* anything you believe is *not right*, you are sinning. – Romans 14:23 NLT

We can sin by what we do OR sin by what we don’t. Which is why **there must be unity between our beliefs and actions before our conscience ever lets us off the hook.** And that *individual* and *internal* unity is called integrity – and it should be step one in our walk of faith. But here’s where we get tripped up: each step of that *same* walk looks different in each *other* believer’s life because *we’re* different. *So we’ve got that in common!* We *all* know what it’s like to be different; in our *placement*, our *perspective*, and our *personality*. We’re united as “*the unique*”.



Doctor Gordon Allport, a pioneering psychologist in Trait Theory, compiled a list of 4,504 personality traits! Like: **followers & leaders, planners & drifters, organized & disorganized, nervous & calm, impulsive & controlled, serious & humorous,** and **structured & spontaneous.** And there are more combinations than *all humans ever* (except for me and the Doc, who might be the same guy). So then, knowing God deliberately designed differences, we must resist the temptation to use our unique personality traits and personal preferences as a gauge for another. **Our responsibility is unity, not uniformity.** And unity is appreciating how all parts make one body. Uniformity is demanding that everyone be an eyeball. If you’re in favor of *that*, go ahead and say “*eye*”.



That's how unity works in the world, and cults, but *ours* is a unique unity of unified uniquenesses.

If the *ear* should say, "Because I am not an *eye*, I do not belong to the *body*," it would not for that reason *cease* to be *part of the body*. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged [for unity] the [unique] parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one [uniform] part, where would the [united] *body* be? – 1 Corinthians 12:16-19 NIV

We're all purposely wired different to complement each other and help one another grow into the fullness of Christ. As His body. And conflicts are just the growing pains of God arranging us. They're not something to run from or snuff out. They're something to lean into and learn from.

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. - Proverbs 27:17 NIV

God *uses* conflict to uncover sinful attitudes and habits in our lives. **Because conflict breaks down appearances.** It reveals what you're really made of, and therefore, where you really belong. Fingers are lying if they're trying to be noses, and it holds up the whole body.



But when we're squeezed through conflict, sinful characteristics are brought to the surface. And if you want to gauge how you're growing in Christ, just watch how you handle conflict. **That's where you see if transformation is really happening.** Are you easy for God to arrange (bump, bump) or do you refuse to budge. Be honest, because that's also where you get a preview of what your conscience will be testifying: "*before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*".

You see, **our Father wants kids NOT clones!** He created us to be different from one another **but the same in our aim.** That's the challenge. And it *is* a challenge for uniquely created beings to unite. And **God designed life that way on purpose.** Because *different* people sharing the *same* space forces us to *find common ground* and *settle those differences* ... or die trying!



I had a friend who used the same principle with *his* kids. Whenever they started fighting, he didn't join in, he just got out the "Big Shirt". The kids knew what that meant – they'd *both* have to wear *it* until the fighting stopped. And it worked like a charm, because the "Big Shirt" taught you real fast: harmony with *others* is always in *my* best interest. Just like harmony within myself, **we must pull ourselves together or we'll rip ourselves apart.** That's why Paul says we must:

Make *every effort* to keep the unity of the Spirit through the *bond* of peace. - Ephesians 4:3 NIV

Now, Bruce read this scripture *multiple* times a couple weeks ago and talked about what those *efforts* look like. But it sure sounds like the "*bond of peace*" is the *key* to their success. So what is it?! Well, I'll tell you, or rather Paul will:

Set your minds on things *above*, not on *earthly* [down here] things. ... as God's *chosen* people, *holy* and *dearly loved*, clothe yourselves with *compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness* and *patience*. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave *you*. And over *all these* virtues [compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience] put on *love, which binds them all together* in perfect unity [not uniformity]. Let the *peace of Christ* [through this bond of Christ-like love] *rule* in your hearts, [because that's *where* it'll matter most, *when* it matters most!] – Colossians 3:1, 12-15 NIV

Surprise, surprise! **Love is the bond that makes the way for the peace of Christ.** The bond of peace is *love*. And you wear it. Because here's the deal – if you're a Christian, you're *already* wearing the "Big Shirt", and **it's either a bond of frustration and division or a bond of peace and unity.** The deciding factor is whether or not you *also* put on a layer of love.



I loved last week's picture of *others* as the crown of life, and *wearing* them as our royal mark. **Now that's how you put on Christ-like love!** But, do you know how we *get* that our Maker's *royal mark*?



Keep the *royal law* found in Scripture, [which is] "Love your neighbor as yourself," – James 2:8 NIV



Otherwise you're just a royal pain! Remember, *He's* the Potter and *we're* the clay; and **our Maker's mark is mercy.** *Not* condemnation. And not condescension. How can I love *you* as I love *me*, if I deny *you* mercy but demand it for *me*? I can't. Not without dishonoring God's *royal law* and His *royal rule* in my *heart*. So, why are we so quick to judge the hearts we know we can't fully know, while resisting judging the only heart we absolutely can? I suppose **pointing out another's faults and judging their conscience makes us feel less guilty about our own.**

Focusing on others enables us to avoid examining ourselves, which allows us to hold onto our sin *and* a false sense of self-respect. So, **we label their sins while re-labeling ours:** I'm not **critical**; I'm **concerned**. I'm not **lazy**; I'm **laid back**. I'm not **negative**; I'm **realistic**. I'm not **unreliable**; I'm **flexible**. I don't **gossip**; I **share** because I care.

Now she, on the other hand, *is a critical, lazy, negative, unreliable, gossip!*

[And] There is nothing so delicious as the taste of gossip! – Proverbs 26:22 CEV

Satan is called the *slanderer* (*diabolos*); don't assist him! You already have work to do for a much a better Boss. And how *absurd* to call Jesus our *Lord*, and then impatiently lash out at fellow believers and family members who are simply not as wise, or mature, or considerate as you. It's the Holy Spirit's job to change us. **It's our job to pray for, support, and encourage each other – that's the Master's command and the merciful mark of our Maker.** Besides, this world has enough discouragers without our help.