

## On Unity

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December 2019

### Information notice board

- 1) **About these series.** This message is taken from our “Maturing into Christ” a series of 12 messages to help new believers and prodigals to head towards maturity. It is the follow on to the 12 messages contained in the Last Season’s “Holding onto Christ”. You can read all the articles in the series as well as watch those videos here:

<https://www.shaweleroad.com/maturing-into-christ>

- 2) **Pray for us!** Without the Lord, our effort is in vain. Pray that we remain faithful, humble.
- 3) **Subscribe to** our [YouTube Channel](#) and keep up with our videos which support the website.

- 4) **Looking for a ministry to partner with (pray, volunteer, give, subscribe to)? Consider supporting:**

<https://transformchurch.us/> This US, Tulsa Oklahoma based church led by Pastor Michael Todd says their mission is: “Re•presenting God to the lost and found for transformation in Christ.”

*The above ministry/website has not paid us to provide this recommendation and so the views expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the ministry promoted above. Likewise the views therein do not necessarily reflect those of this ministry.*

### This message covers

- What unity means to Jesus
- How to know a genuine church with whom to be united.
- What innovations can you learn from different churches

## Part 1: Basics

### **The Holy Spirit**

On 4/11/19, I received a message from the Lord as I was doing my regular devotional. It was an encouragement and an exhortation. It was a bible verse:

*“For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for him and how you have shown your love to him by caring for other believers, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true. Then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and endurance.”*

*Hebrews 6:10-12 NLT*

It helps to see that even when the Holy Spirit speaks, he is consistently pointing us to Jesus and the things important to him. What are those things?

Before Jesus was arrested and crucified, as he spent one of the final times with his disciples, he prayed a very special prayer for them and those who would come after them. That prayer was for them to be united – as proof that we are his followers. John 17, which contains this prayer says:



*“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” John 17: 20-21 (NIV).*

Speaking again through his servant Paul, Jesus then warns against those who try to cause disunity in the church. A warning so severe it could mean loss of inheritance in heaven and it is as follows:

*The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, **dissensions, factions** and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5: 19 – 21 (NIV).*

- *Dissentions means strong disagreement that leads to discord or break ups.*
- *“Faction” in another version (NLT) means “division”.*

**So you see, Jesus takes fights, dissention and divisions as serious as he takes sexual immorality or witchcraft and the consequences are the same! Let he who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.**

Unity in the church is critical as it is a form of evangelism to the world. A Church that is united, resting upon Christ as the foundation, truly will prevail over the gates of hell (Matthew 16:18).

The gates of hell are really coming upon us! There are 30,000 Christian clergy of all types in the UK, and more than 80,000 registered witches and fortune tellers.<sup>i</sup> It’s therefore a real battle here and so being united is critical for us to overcome the enemy.

### ***The body of Christ***

The church is also the body of Christ and a body shouldn’t be divided – how can it stand? IN fact, there are several facts Christians should know about this Body of Christ. Here are some examples<sup>ii</sup>.

- 1) Members of the Body of Christ are joined to Christ in salvation ([Ephesians 4:15-16](#)).

*Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. Ephesians 4: 15-16 (ESV).*

- 2) Members of the Body of Christ possess a diversity of gifts suited to particular functions ([1 Corinthians 12:4-31](#)). “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ”:

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*

*For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. 1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 20 (ESV).*

It is therefore the same one Lord over all the churches. It is this ONE LORD who tells the churches:

- **Repent.** Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent (Rev 2: 5 NKJV).
- **Hold on.** Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw *some* of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2: 10 NKJV).
- **Get rid of some things.** I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality (Rev 2: 14 NKJV).
- **Overcome.** he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations—  
'He shall rule them with a rod of iron;  
They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter's vessels' (Rev 2: 26 NKJV).
- **You are dead.** I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. (Rev 3: 1-2 NKJV).
- **I know you have little strength.** See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name. (Rev 3: 8 NKJV).
- **I will vomit you.** So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth (Rev 3: 16 NKJV).

## Part 2: Our generation: The process of coming to unity.

While Jesus wished for us to be united, the reality of the world today is that there is loads of division in the Church. Can you for example tell the difference between Anglicans and Methodists and Baptists and Presbyterians and Lutherans and Calvinists and Evangelicals<sup>iii</sup>?

Is it correct for example that Catholics in Catechism 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition say that: *Mary was a virgin when she conceived Jesus and when she gave birth. She remained a virgin throughout her life.* Is this a heresy or simply a difference in interpretation of the bible?

Is it likewise correct that while Baptists, Lutherans and Methodists hold on to the Bible Only (Sola Scriptura) for doctrine others like the Anglicans, Presbyterians and Roman Catholics hold on to more e.g Church fathers, Confession of Faith and Popes/Bishops. Is this a mark of false religion, heresy?

Is there a purpose in having divisions in the various “denominations”?

The bible says actually yes there is a purpose for division.

*No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 1 Corinthians 11: 19 (NIV).*

So the process then of the church coming to unity can be seen as follows:

- 1) **First divisions.** Divisions separate the sheep from the goats. Who is holding steadfast and who isn't. The TRUE believers are known through testing of the marks of false religion and true religion.
- 2) **Differences vs heresy.** Minor differences should not cause one to be branded a "heretic". There can be differences even among genuine Christians. Some Christian say for example you should be "baptised in the Holy Spirit" while others say, this is automatic at salvation. Others hold different eschatological views – some say the 1,000 year reign of Christ (millennium) has come and other say it is only symbolic. These differences do not make one a heretic.
- 3) **Test.** To be able to identify if someone is for us or against Christ - test the Spirit! This is the test:
  - Test that they hold on to the Apostles teaching - what Jesus prayed, for that which the apostles preached is the true gospel. Anyone who doesn't preach this has the spirit of the anti-christ which is indeed already at work and such should be resisted as "False teachers" or "False religion" if they don't return to the truth.

4. **For our brethren.** Having separated the sheep from the goats and tested the false from the genuine, differentiating what is heresy vs a minor difference, we can then to those who hold on to the truth embrace them in unity. Unity means:

- show them hospitality;
- Pray for their ministries even if different from yours;
- Financially support them - for example the persecuted church in China, the home church in Iran; and
- Promote them -Talk about them, host them, visit them!

### Part 3: What can you learn from different churches?

There is a beauty in seeing what other churches do. While I primarily attend *Lighthouse Church* in Jersey and *Willow Creek Church* in Chicago, other churches are doing interesting things for example:

- I have actively supported Watoto Church in Uganda and their mission around orphans and disadvantaged children (watoto infact means little ones or children in Swahili);
- I loved the "testimony" segment before a sermon at St Paul's Church in Jersey;
- I likewise was touched by the children's presentation at St Mark's Church in Jersey; and
- Transformation church of Tulsa OK which I regularly visit online sometimes has one Sunday in a month that you can visit other churches.

Other innovative ideas at different churches include<sup>iv</sup>:

#### Seacoast church<sup>v</sup>

- Started in a movie theatre as an overarching founding mission to reach those who were too intimidated to attend a traditional church.
- Single moms can receive free car maintenance through the church's car service ministry.
- Seacoast has attempted to dispel the megachurch stigma. The church doesn't pass around collection plates on the weekends. Instead, members voluntarily drop funds into offering boxes or give online.
- The church also features a large team of pastors and teachers who take turns speaking, so there isn't one single personality that defines Seacoast.

### **Saddleback church<sup>vi</sup>**

- 7,500 small groups meeting in homes.
- PEACE centers provide assistance locally with food, medical help and counselling.
- A PEACE Plan<sup>vii</sup> for someone to learn “how to live your life on mission” – Planting churches that promote reconciliation, Equipping servant leaders, Assisting the Poor, Caring for the Sick and Educating the Next Generation.

### **Life. Church**

Despite at one point having 100,000 in church attendance at physical locations, they refuse to call themselves big.

Lead Pastor *Craig Groeschel* when interviewed about quantifying and tracking different aspects of ministry said:<sup>viii</sup>

*Modern church leaders aren't the first to measure spiritual results. Throughout the Bible, we see evidence of leaders counting and measuring. Someone else said, "Every number has a name. Every name has a story. And every story matters to God."*

*So at Life.Church we measure more than most people can imagine. In fact, at last count, we track over 900 different things. We believe that where performance is measured, performance improves. Since we have the most important mission on planet earth, we will always have high expectations, help people improve and measure what matters.*

About offering he said: “I love that we tell people they can take cash out of the offering if they have a need.”

On Launching their “open resources site”:

*God has enabled us to give away the Bible App to people on 200 million mobile devices. Looking back, it was the moment that we started to give that God started to bless us with financial resources.*

And on pivotal moments in the church:

*One of the most important decisions we made was probably around 2005. As a church, we decided to limit what we did to only five areas of focus. Instead of continuing to add ministries (like sports, singles, men's, women's, conferences, etc.), we chose to focus on these things: 1) weekend worship, 2) small groups, 3) kids ministry, 4) student ministry and 5) missions.*

*Because of our relationship with other churches through free resources, we were able to unite over 2,300 churches to do a series together called One Prayer that turned into a global movement of prayer, serving, giving and church planting.*

And discussing disagreements (in unity):

*It... seems to surprise people that our top leaders have been together for the last 17 years. To me that's normal—but evidently it's a blessing I shouldn't take for granted. And even though we're still together and very unified, many would be shocked by the healthy debates we have. (“Healthy debates” is a nice way to say “serious disagreements.”) We are so diversified in our gifts and experiences that we often clash and butt heads, but God seems to use our differences to make us more effective than we could ever be on our own.*

### Prestonwood Baptist Church<sup>ix</sup>

- A choir of over 500 members and an orchestra
- PowerPoint Ministries<sup>[13]</sup>, launched in 1994, is a ministry which broadcasts Dr. Graham's sermons on radio, television and online. The television broadcasts air on major networks such as [Trinity Broadcasting Network](#) and [Daystar Television Network](#).
- The Prestonwood Foundation raises funds for various endowments of church ministries, and also provides financial counseling and estate planning services.<sup>[10]</sup> One of its offerings is to provide a free "basic" [will](#) (i.e., one with simple distributions upon death, as opposed to multiple bequests to multiple heirs) to any person attending a free one-hour seminar on the necessity of having a will (though registration in advance is required, the seminars are open to anyone in the community, not just members or church attendees).<sup>[11]</sup>
- The [Gift of Christmas](#) (GOC), one of the nation's largest Christmas pageants, as well as one of the top-rated Christmas-related events in the state of Texas. Each year the production features thirteen performances (nearly all of which sell out shortly after tickets are available) attended by almost 70,000 members of the public.

### United Methodist Church<sup>x</sup>

- **Education.** Throughout its history, the United Methodist Church has placed great emphasis on the importance of education. As such, the United Methodist Church established and is affiliated with around one hundred [colleges](#) and [universities](#) in the United States. The church operates three hundred sixty schools and institutions overseas.
- **Women clergy.** The Methodist Church has allowed [ordination of women](#) with full rights of clergy since 1956.
- **The Church of the Resurrection UMC** has an important vision to close the Gap<sup>xi</sup> and this includes: Closing the spiritual gap, closing the generational gap, closing the justice and kindness gap and closing the opportunity gap.

## Next steps

1. What other innovations can you find about "top churches", look them up. This list can help:

<https://churchrelevance.com/2010/01/01/top-churches-in-america/>

**2. Pray for your church and the church of Christ on earth.** On 18/10/19 after reading a number of articles showing that Christianity is in decline, I initially got depressed but then a thought came to me: "what if Christianity thrives in persecution?" "What if true faith comes in times of decline?" I realised that the church grew most during persecution when people are forced to know what they believe with certainty not as a perfunctory "family religion" or "official religion". John the Baptist came during a 400 year famine for God's word.

Maybe times of persecution are coming upon the church and this might be what prompts it to become even more united. Let he who has an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Churches.

**3. Expect disagreements.** What if you disagree with a church? Some of the churches considered "innovative" are often in the news for controversy as it is termed. The Methodist Church over LGBTI rights for example. How do you apply the biblical principles in addressing the issues in a gentle way?

4. **Join a church or introduce someone to one.** What can you do to help other churches and other believers? If you have never visited a church, how about starting online? Many churches have online versions.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Bible in one year 2019. 19/5/19

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/body-of-Christ.html>

<sup>iii</sup> This article can help: <https://www.learnreligions.com/comparing-christian-denominations-beliefs-part-1-700537>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://churchrelevance.com/2010/01/01/top-churches-in-america/>

<sup>v</sup> [https://www.postandcourier.com/news/seacoast-grows-into-new--seat-sanctuary-at-mount-pleasant/article\\_2b266ab8-604f-11e9-bdc1-9b9eefecdb12.html](https://www.postandcourier.com/news/seacoast-grows-into-new--seat-sanctuary-at-mount-pleasant/article_2b266ab8-604f-11e9-bdc1-9b9eefecdb12.html)

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.oregister.com/2015/06/08/saddleback-church-raising-71-million-for-its-largest-expansion-yet/>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://saddleback.com/connect/ministry/the-peace-plan>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://outreachmagazine.com/interviews/13347-craig-groeschel-life-church-at-20-years-part-1-of-2.html>

<sup>ix</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestonwood\\_Baptist\\_Church#Ministries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prestonwood_Baptist_Church#Ministries)

<sup>x</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Methodist\\_Church#Ordination\\_of\\_women](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Methodist_Church#Ordination_of_women)

<sup>xi</sup> <https://build.cor.org/>