

## SERMON SERIES ON WHAT WE BELIEVE

*We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **Introduction**

Two men were standing on a bridge, one is about to jump off and the other is trying to talk him out of it.

The one man asks the jumper, "Are you religious?"

The jumper replies, "Yes, I'm a Christian."

The man says, "Small world, me too! Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox?"

The jumper answers, "Protestant."

The man replies, "Me too! What denomination?"

The jumper says, "Baptist"

The man replies, "Me too! Southern Baptist or Northern Baptist?"

The jumper answers, "Northern Baptist."

The man replies, "Me too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

The jumper answers, "Northern Conservative Baptist."

The man replies, "Me too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern region?"

The jumper answers, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region."

The man replies, "Me too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region council of 1912?"

The jumper answers, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region council of 1912."

The man then pushes the jumper off the bridge and screams, "Die Heretic!"

Then there was the man who had been stranded on an island all by himself, for years. When his rescuers finally came, before they left, he asked them if they wanted to see what he had built while he was there. They were impressed when he showed them his house, which had several rooms full of furniture he had made. He showed them his yard, with a flower-lined path and fence, and even a garden he had made. Then to their astonishment, he took them to a little church he had built. But then one of the rescuers noticed another building just a little ways down the road that also looked like a church. When he inquired about that building, the man replied, "Oh, that was the church I used to go to!"

We laugh at these jokes, but they reflect the sad truth that, though we may have similar beliefs that should bind us together, there is a disturbing lack of unity among believers. And often, such lack of unity is due to relatively petty differences, which hinder the church from accomplishing its purpose, and also provides ammunition for those who criticize and even reject religion in general, and Christianity in particular.

On the other hand, it's also true that the desire and effort for unity can sometimes lead to compromise and even dangerous and disastrous unions.

And so, the doctrine of unity is an important one to consider and establish.

*We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. And the doctrine of unity is important because . . .*

## **I. Unity is spoken of in the Word of God.**

***How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore. (Psalm 133:1-3 NIV)***

***It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach UNITY IN THE FAITH and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)***

***May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you A SPIRIT OF UNITY among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5-6 NIV)***

***Make every effort to keep THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit-- just as you were called to one hope when you were called-- one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Ephesians 4:3-7 NIV)***

***Therefore, 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 put on love, which binds them all together in PERFECT UNITY. (Colossians 3:12-14 NIV)***

This is just a sampling of passages in the Bible that speak to the topic of unity. But why is unity so important?

**II. Unity is important because we see unity perfectly reflected in the one God in whose image we were made.**

The Bible affirms over and over that there is only one God. But we see God manifesting Himself in three Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And though these three Persons are distinct among themselves, they are in perfect unity.

Jesus said, ***I and the Father are one.***" (John 10:30 NIV)

And Jesus prayed, ***Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name--the name you gave me--SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE ONE.*** (John 17:11 NIV)

***"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. I have given them the glory that you gave me, THAT THEY MAY BE ONE AS WE ARE ONE: I in them and you in me. MAY THEY BE BROUGHT TO COMPLETE UNITY TO LET THE WORLD KNOW THAT YOU SENT ME and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23 NIV)***

### **III. Unity is important because Satan has distorted it.**

We must understand that the unity we're speaking of is not a *uniformity*. This is the common mark of a cult where all followers are encouraged, even required to be the same, following a narrow and ridged system of rules and requirements.

Nor is the unity we're considering *universalism*. This is what we're seeing today in the worldviews of pluralism and tolerance, which say all religions are basically the same and ultimately lead to the same God. And so, all religions are equally valid; there is no one "true" religion.

The tolerance being preached today says we must be respectful of all religions and even atheism, because they can all contribute to the ultimate good of mankind. Indeed, they point out that intolerance and exclusivism in religion is the cause of great harm to mankind!

But these are all distortions of the truth, coming from the father of lies! If the time is taken to examine just the major religions, glaring and totally incompatible differences are obvious.

But blurring these distinctions is one of Satan's most effective devices. And the world will see the ultimate deception of this distortion in the antichrist, who will rally the whole world around a universal religion that will bring the world to the brink of complete destruction.

Yes, unity is important, but we must guard against the distortion of the right kind of unity.

### **IV. Unity is important because it results in God's greatest blessings.**

Including the blessing of . . .

- reflecting God's image and likeness (see Jn. 17:11)
- exercising our God-given dominion over the earth (see Jn. 17:23; Rom. 12:4)
- realizing and exercising a mutual love and concern for one another (see Acts 4:32; Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 3:12-14). Such love and concern doesn't mean always agreeing. But it's what helps us in our disagreements to work through them and come out better for them.
- realizing the fullness of our purpose (see Rom. 15:5-6; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Chron. 30:12)

- realizing God’s anointing and the resulting fruitfulness (see Acts 2:1-4, 41; Ps. 133:1-3)

## Conclusion

The challenge for the church has always been, how do we promote the right kind of unity? I believe Paul addressed that when he wrote . . .

***For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they [all] drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.*** (1 Corinthians 10:1-4 NIV)

There is one way, one truth, and one life—Jesus Christ (Jn. 14:6). Therefore, we must proclaim that one truth, and not compromise for the sake of peace or any other reason—especially the universalism that is seducing many in the church today.

At the same time, we must recognize diversity in the body of Christ (see 1 Cor. 12:4-6), and appreciate and even celebrate that diversity, guarding against uniformity—expecting everyone to be like us.

Thirdly, we must demonstrate unity in the exercise of mutual love and concern for one another, just as all the members of our physical body care for each part.

Finally, we must have the same *attitude* (see Philip. 2:5ff), and the same *purpose* (Philip 2:2)—which is not to glorify ourselves or our style or “brand” of Christianity, but to glorify God in this world.

Like the people of God . . .

***When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws, THEY RESPONDED WITH ONE VOICE, "Everything the LORD has said we will do."***  
(Exodus 24:3 NIV)

And when Solomon brought the Ark to the Temple, we read . . .

***The trumpeters and singers joined in unison, as WITH ONE VOICE, to give praise and thanks to the LORD. (2 Chronicles 5:13 NIV)***

May our unity also be demonstrated in our praise of and obedience to the one God.