

Local Churches in Unity & Cooperation

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Take your Bibles and go to Matthew 9. I confess upfront this is going to be something of a foundation stone to look at a number of things as we kind of seek to grasp what I call a systematic, a biblically systematic overview of the truth of local churches in unity and cooperation, something we've just kind of always done in, in all segments of evangelical Christianity. There's always been a group we're connected with and overwhelmingly so, most of us, uh, connect with a certain local church that's connected to other local churches in, uh, purpose and in missions because that's what our fathers did and that's what their fathers did, and that's what their fathers did.

My dear dear friend, Brother Jono Sims, at the Shelbyville Mills Baptist Church in Shelbyville, TN, um, I believe I'm saying this right, it's many, I think he said he's a fifth generation Southern Baptist but they're not so much Southern Baptist now in his conviction and opinion, but he said, "That's just what I come from." But, um, it's the nature – listen to me – if you study church history, it's the nature of everything, when man puts a system together and it's not bad, it's not wrong, and very very obviously so many of them started with godly men and good intentions, but as the years and the decades and the centuries go by, there becomes a bureaucracy, an institutionalization of things, uh, essential doctrine begins to erode away and the whole system can begin to function on things and for things that have nothing to do with sound biblical Christianity. We have great, uh, denominations, um, Methodists, Presbyterians, and now quite a few Baptists denominations who have – listen, folks – not just struggling here and there, they've woefully lost the path of being true churches.

Um, and now we, I, I'm not coming to you as some new prophet. I'm not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, I'm just a Baptist, a preacher, a Baptist preacher in conviction, not, not necessarily the denominationally speaking but Baptist in the sense of what the history of what Baptists believed and stood for. But my point is the trend is they just seem to get on the downgrade and they begin to connect together and unite together around things that have nothing to do with why they existed in the first place. So we find ourselves much like John Wesley, the father of Methodism, and George Whitefield, the father of Calvinistic Methodism of a few centuries ago, where they were Anglicans, Church of England, and they began to exegete the Bible and preach the word of God and call on all those infant baptized, dead Anglicans to repent and come to faith in Christ. In

other words, cash in your counterfeit religion, cash in your church membership and really find Christ. They had no concept of starting anything new but it didn't take too long before the Anglican Church hierarchy said, "You guys gotta go. You gotta get out of here. You're messing everything up. We've got us a system going here and people are comfortable in it and, um, it's financially okay and, and we just don't need you to mess it up with this doctrine of you must be born again." And so it ended up new movements came out of that to a significant extent. A lot of our Baptist forefathers were powerfully influenced by their preaching and example, and even the Methodist Church that, by the way, corporately and, um, uh, denominationally speaking, has woefully lost its way. I love my Methodist brothers and sisters and there's some Methodist pastors still trying to preach it straight but on the whole the system and the hierarchy are apostate. They just are. Folks, listen to me, you can't debate about whether or not homosexuality is a sin before God and not be off-track. I mean, just, I mean, think about it for a moment. Churches are debating that. This isn't, um, the left wing of the Democratic Party. Churches, denominations.

So it brings us who are far from perfect but who are striving to be faithful repenters and striving to walk in biblical truth, well, who do we unite with and who do we cooperate with? And I'll be honest, I've been studying, praying and reading history for literally decades on that issue, and this is not new to many of you in any ways, and most of this is drawn out of some things that I taught in my classes in the Pastor's Training Institute, but I wanted to hit you guys with it. Are you listening to me this morning? Us equipping pastors and us partnering with pastors and mentoring pastors and, and, uh, continuing to support them as they revitalize their churches and, and plant new biblical churches, that work is, first of all, it's laborious and difficult and expensive but it's not my work and it's not Brother Steve's work, and Brother Tim's work, or Brother Matt, or any of us, though we're all in various degrees involved, it's not our work, it's all of our work. It's your, look, are you listening to me Grace Life Church of the Shoals? God's called us to this and I don't mean some special unique calling. We may not be, we may be one of the few really doing it, matter of fact, we are one of the few really doing this, but that doesn't make us special, that's just old Bible stuff people just ought to be doing it. You're just crazy enough to follow me and do it. I say crazy only in the context of so few are doing it, we look weird or odd, but we have gotten significant affirmation and commendation for what we're about from people in high places, as if people in high places matter to God. Are you listening to me? Just because he's Professor So-and-so and President So-and-so of So-and-so Institution, doesn't mean God's impressed at all. And I thank God for these men, don't misunderstand me. There's some good brothers who are professors and good brothers who are presidents of schools, but there's nothing in Scripture about their blessing or affirmation makes us good or right.

Now it's good when we get it, amen? We appreciate that and we've gotten a lot of that. When we, uh, were first putting the Pastor's Training Institute together and, uh, Brother Tim began to organize and lay out everything, we agreed that we're not worrying about a, the accreditation of the world, um, but if we can achieve what we, we know needs to happen and still get that accreditation, that's okay. And so Brother Tim sent out our stuff to one of our accredited graduate schools of theology and they almost immediately said,

"We'll give your guys full credit for everything if these standards are kept." They were, they were impressed. It's good when people, a, affirm what you're doing but, uh, shall I say that, um, there are, there's a world full of pastors who have degrees and Ph.D.'s and a lot of things who are not very faithful effective pastors. Well, I'm kinda chasing a rabbit but if you catch that rabbit, it can be a pretty good thing.

So who are we to cooperate with? So we're entitling this "Local Churches in Unity & Cooperation," alright? Local churches in unity and in cooperation, and by the way, that order is essential. There has to be a true unity and then there can be cooperation. What's trying to be forced today is force us into unities or into cooperation, rather, when we don't have the unity as the foundation we're supposed to have. In other words, God is the one who makes us unified. We don't try to be, now we can build on the unity he gives us, we can work at the unity he's established but we can't make a unity, God does that and then we work at cooperating together because of the unity he gave us.

Well, here's the foundation stone I want to pick up, pick up on and go from. Uh, Matthew 9 and I'm gonna go up to verse 35 and go through 38, alright? Matthew 9:35,

35 And Jesus was going about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.

Would it not have been amazing to have been there in that day and watched that and experience that? Verse 36,

36 And seeing the multitudes, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and downcast like sheep without a shepherd.

Now can I pause there and just give a side note? I'm convinced part of Jesus' concern, part of his burden for all these people coming – now listen to me – was because overwhelmingly so they were coming for the next free meal because he was miraculously feeding a lot of them, overwhelmingly so they were coming for a miraculous healing because he was doing lots of that, and that's not bad but that's not the main reason he came. He was burdened because they don't realize the sinful wretchedness of their souls, they don't realize that they're under the wrath of God, and they can't get their hearts and minds off of temporal blessings to see the things that really matter. I'm not saying that's all of his burden but I think that's the main reason he's burdened about all of these people coming.

Verse 37,

37 Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. 38 Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Now we have to study the balance of Scripture to know, okay, what does God say real workers are? What do they look like? What must they believe? What must they do before we can get very serious about sending them out. Not every person that gets excited and has a deep emotional sentiment about serving the Lord is a good or true worker. We need qualifications beyond the sentimental realm. You and I live in an age when all of a sudden sentimentality is the final truth. "I feel like I'm really a, a girl though I was born a boy. Well, I feel like I ought to have sex with all these different kinds of people. Well, I feel like..." And we go on and on and on and then politicians fall all over themselves to embrace and promote and encourage all of this stuff. Folks, there is no limit to the kind of warped perverted feelings that can come out of the fallen depraved human heart. We do not live by our sentimentalities, we do not live by feelings or emotions, we live by the objective truth God has given us in his word. That's the only way to have any kind of decency or sanity in a, in a, in a, uh, in a society or in a culture. There was a day in America, though there were many non-Christians but overwhelmingly the populace held to a Christian consensus that the Bible contained the moral absolutes and the truths men and culture should live by. We call that a, a, a godly worldview or a God-centered worldview, sometimes you could call it, the Judeo-Christian ethic, and it kind of held us all together.

Uh, I talked to a man who was an avowed agnostic years ago and he would basically agree with the moral principles of the Bible being the basis for our laws for our culture because he said without that, well, we'll just be in chaos and anarchy. As the Bible says, when there was no, no, um, judges in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes. I'm going full circle now back to church life now. If we're gonna be involved in helping men be good pastors and build sound churches, we've gotta go beyond, "Well, I just feel like that's best." Well, on some things that's okay because some things the Bible's not clear on and you just have to discern, "I think this is best." There's nothing in the Bible that says Jeff Noblit shall begin doing an exposition of 2 Timothy in two weeks, but I feel like that's what I need to do. But when it comes to churches and the leaders or the pastors of the churches, there's an abundance of rock-solid, biblically systematic truth we're to base that on and function out of. Amen? And when a church, a denomination, or whoever, clearly departs from clear biblical, now we're not talking about things that are difficult to understand, we're not talking about things that good and godly men who know the Scriptures could have a little difference of viewpoint on. We're not talking about those things. We're talking about things the Bible is really clear on. We trust the word of God.

Well, let me, I., talk about the Creator of our unity and oneness. Uh, I used the word "cooperation" in the outline on the screen, same idea. The Creator. Where does this come from? You see, brothers and sisters, Christian unity doesn't come from you and I, uh, drawing up out of our natural fallen abilities and gritting our teeth and saying we're gonna learn to serve in love together. Boy, that's the Baptist way right there, fleshly-empowered and just trying to do the best they can in the powers of their natural fallen flesh. No, no, no. Our unity is a supernatural thing gifted to us in God's grace. Now we have to work at it but it's the foundation comes from him. We have to grow in it but it originally comes from him.

A few things to think about. One shepherd and one flock because it's something I want to talk about for just a moment. One shepherd and one flock. John 10:7, "So Jesus said to them again, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of,'" definite article, "'the sheep.'" Our unity becomes from the fact that we all come to God through one door. Can I say this to you? I'm gonna say it to you. "No one, no one," Jesus said, "comes to the Father but by Me." There's only one door. There's not a best door or a better door, or the most in, uh, encouraging door. There's only one door and his name is Jesus. Automatically we are radically connected one to another when we turn to Christ as Lord and Savior because we've all denied all the other doors the world would put before us and we turned and we've chosen one door, the door, Jesus Christ. So you'd better get used to me and you'd better get used to that brother or sister around you because we've all gone into the same house and we're just gonna have to live together, amen?

I don't, have you noticed, I don't know that you've noticed this, have you noticed in this house called the sheepfold, have you noticed when you went into the door there are some peculiar sheep in there? There's some strange, some strange birds in there. Yeah, but when, even though they're a little peculiar, a little goofy, a little odd maybe, and by the way, you probably are to some, nevertheless what we have that unites us is greater than all that other stuff. God did this.

John 10:11. There's so many things we could use but I just found this in John and I thought this was a good foundation stone. "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for," definite article, "the sheep." Not going into all the theological concepts of universal atonement views or particular redemption or particular atonement and all those kind of things but, brothers and sisters, there's a unique sense in which Jesus died to secure the sheep, definite article there. However you want to slice it and I know there are some texts that we struggle with and I struggle with, but you'll never convince me that Jesus died savingly for all the goats who don't get to heaven. If Jesus died the eternal Son of God to vicariously atone for their sins, their sins are vicariously atoned for and they'll be in heaven.

Here's what I'm saying: this separates you out. Now it doesn't mean you're supposed to leave your union. It doesn't mean you're supposed to leave your employment. It, this doesn't mean you can't be a part of a, a social club in town, though most of them aren't worth being a part of. It doesn't mean you can't send your kids to the school and play ball with the other kids. But it means that what's most important and foundational to what I am and what my family is, is that we are those Christ died to save and bring into the fold. You see, he established this oneness. He established this unity.

John 10:14-16, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own," definite now, "My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold," in the context of Jew and Gentile, he's talking about Gentile sheep, "and I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice." He said, and now that was shocking news to the Jews of this day. They thought the Messiah was coming for just Israel, the Savior was just coming for

Israel. He said, "Now wait a minute, time out. I've got this," now folks, you can't, you can't, you can't comprehend how mind-boggling and how enanging, is that a word, how it angered the Jewish religious authorities to have the concept in their minds that non-Jews could be accepted in the covenant elect family of God. But I'm thankful they are because I don't know about anybody in our church that's of Jewish descendants. I'm not. I don't know anybody. We're all Gentiles and Jesus said, "I've got Gentiles I'm bringing into the fold." Now he said, "Even though in the world's concept Jew and Gentile are radically opposed to one another," he says, "the fold that I've got that's out of the Jews will hear My voice, those I've got out of the Gentiles will hear My voice," and notice the last phrase, John 10:16, "and they will become one flock with one shepherd." Powerful unity there. Now notice the actor in all of this is Jesus Christ. The initiator, the one who accomplishes this is Jesus Christ. He forms this glorious unity. It is the creation of God through the work of his Son Jesus Christ.

Now let's think about churches as a whole, all these local churches. We know that the word "church, ekklesia" as it is in the original Greek that we find throughout our New Testament, what is it, almost 100 times it's used and in almost every time it's clearly talking about a local, visible body of baptized believers. Not some great big universal church. No, when it talks about church, it means that group, us today in this room that meets together. Okay, they can see each other, they can serve each other, they can love each other, they can correct each other, they can help each other, that's what the Bible is talking about overwhelmingly in the New Testament when it uses the word "church." The churches of Galatia. The churches of Antioch. The church at Jerusalem. Specific, identifiable, visible bodies of believers. However, though every local church is an independent autonomous body with no hierarchy or authority other than Christ and the word of God, we are in God's eyes still one flock with one shepherd.

Now we don't experience that in this time and space history setting that we're in now, we're, we have to function in local churches. I mean, you can't get up in the morning and say, "I'm a member of the great, big, universal church, the bride of Christ. I might flow over to Loretta, TN and worship for a couple of weeks and I might float down to, uh, uh, Chattanooga, TN and I'll worship with the sheep over there. I might go down to Birmingham for a month because I'm just a, I'm just a part of all the people of God." You know what you'll be? You'll be a worthless Christian. How can you ever get God's work done with that kind of independent, frivolous, shallow, childish view of serving God? No, God's not the God of irrationality and, and confusion. He wants you to join a local church, unite together under the elders of that church and covenant together in that one local church to serve God and get his work done.

Now we're talking about we're one shepherd with one flock. God created this. To amplify on that concept, let's talk about Jesus' prayer for our unity. This is a powerful thing as the Lord Jesus is getting close to the cross in his earthly ministry, and he gives a lot of energy in interceding to the Father about Christians being united, being one. John 17:11 for example, "I am no longer in the world," he's praying to the Father, "yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name," now not the whole world now, he's not talking about keeping people, he's talking about my church out

of the world, keep that group in your name, "the name which You have given Me," now here he comes to the end of that, "so that they may be one even as We are one." He said, "I, I want You to keep them," and I think you can add the concept, "I want You to keep growing them as individual Christians so that they grasp how they are radically, gloriously, supernaturally one together one to the other."

Brothers and sisters, your oneness with true brothers and sisters in Christ and in the New Testament concept in your local church, your oneness to those folks is stronger than your oneness to any blood relative who does not know Christ. Absolutely. Now it doesn't mean you don't love them and still live with them and care for them. Of course we do, but as you mature, you begin to see my intimacy with my spiritual brothers and sisters is stronger than any other connectivity, any other intimacy, any other connection I could have while I'm on the earth.

It's, it's very interesting. I don't know why but my mind goes back to the township of Soweto in South Africa. This was years ago, this was right in the height of the apartheid, uh, revolution, if you will, or the revolution against the apartheid doctrine of South Africa as the blacks of South Africa regained governance and authority over the, that part of the country. And I was in the township that was pretty much the centerpiece of violence and uprising in South Africa and if you want to read some history of some very violent, difficult days and they still have a lot of that, but it was very violent and difficult in those days. And like always – are you listening to me – it wasn't as simple as black colored skin and white colored skin, there was righteous, godly, loving Christians together of all skin colors in the groups I ministered with.

But I go in this church in the, the township Soweto in South Africa and I'm quite aware that it's fairly common for machine guns to come out in those settings, and they began to sing the songs of the faith and you know how they did it? The pastor's wife sat about halfway back on one side and she starts singing and everybody would sing with her. I've never been in a church setting and I believe I was the only white-skinned person there, I've never been in a church setting that was more blessed, sweet, spiritual, and encouraging than that setting. But I thought, "I don't know any of these people. I'm not kin to any of these people. Uh, I don't come from the background they come. I don't know anything but we are one." God did that. Jeff Noblit didn't just walk down there and say, "Boy, I'm a progressive and I'm, I'm gonna have a new approach to life and then we're gonna have this big new unity movement in the earth and I'm..." No, he didn't. God saved me and God saved them. We just happened to be there and worship together that day.

That's what baffles me about all the racial issues in our country today. I think when I get together with Christians, it simply doesn't matter. It's just not an issue. It, I'm, I'm telling you it's just not an issue if you're in Christ. And that's what Jesus prayed for. There, there's this powerful oneness that he has put together. I, I need to preach a little longer because you're only getting one dose a day on Sunday and I know how you are, you leak. I leak. We all leak.

John 17:21-23. Jesus is continuing his prayer to the Father, "that they may all be one," there he goes again, "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." He said there's something powerful when the world sees all of us from all these backgrounds and we shouldn't get along together but we love each other and we realize we're one together for time and eternity and it's just super special and God did it and the world looks at it and they, they, they marvel over that because you know why? The world can't do that. The world can't produce that unity. Only God can do that.

"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one," notice that, that end product again, this oneness, "I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." That's a powerful phrase. Jesus says, "I, Lord, I," he's saying, "Father in heaven, I want them to be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me." Now the phrase "perfected in unity" has the idea of a spiritual maturity which has unity as its chief fruit. Listen now. Be careful. Don't miss it. Unity is not the goal. Unity in truth is the goal. Unity in Christ is the goal.

What was it, old preachers, you know, old preachers have all these illustrations and you say, "Brother Jeff, you, you're kind of an old preacher." Okay, I am, but you can tie two cats' tails together and throw them over a clothesline and you've got togetherness but you don't have unity. Overwhelmingly so in our churches, they do not know the unity of the Spirit in Christ. There's no perfection. There's no maturity in the body so that they enjoy the sweet spiritual unity that only God can provide.

It's been many years, we're approaching being able to say decades, not quite there yet but we're approaching at Grace Life Church of the Shoals to be able to say we have not had even a small blemish on our sweet unity in this church in a long long long time. And there's only one reason for that: you won't allow it. You will not allow worldly, fleshly, selfish, emotionalism things to form a group to cause a problem in God's church. It's not a matter of the pastor and the, the elders and the deacons, even the small group leaders keeping it put down. I mean, that's our job, the Bible commands us to do that but just the membership at large just won't tolerate anybody coming in who wants to start some sort of sect or faction or movement. Why? Because there's a mature. We've, hey, any of you been here for a few decades? We've seen that. We've experienced that and we prefer what we're enjoying now.

Now the unity as we span, expand out, the unity that we're to have as individual churches now, see here we're going to another level. Individual local churches now. If we're going to unite together and cooperate together to get God's work done, and by the way, we have to do that. It's so abundantly clear in the New Testament that that's just expected that local churches will connect together, unite together and do God's work together, alright? But the unity among individual local churches is not an absolute equality but based on the likeness of the churches. In other words, one church has been at it for 20 and 30 years, they're just gonna look different than a brother who's faithful but he's only been at it, let's say, five years in his church. You can't say, "Well, well, they can't be united with us

because look how, look where they are and look where we are." That's not the point. If their convictions are right and their hearts are right and they're striving to get there, then, hey, they're united with us, amen? We take in baby Christians and we take them just like they are and baby Christians make messes, and baby Christians are immature, and baby Christians get back in the flesh a lot, and baby Christians go by their feelings and emotions. And that's okay. We've been there too. We're all growing still and those of us who've been around a long time, if we're not careful can backslide and start acting like babies ourselves. So what we're looking for is a genuine intent that they're on track biblically and spiritually and, hey, if they are, they're one with us, amen? So it's not an absolute equality concerning application and experience because that takes time, but it's the likeness between us that we can come together in unity.

James E. Carter. I don't know where I found this quote. I don't know who he is but he said this. "Churches cannot do without one another even though they are distinct from one another." You're not a part of the Anchored in Truth family of churches. No, you're a part of Grace Life Church of the Shoals which is connected with the Anchored in Truth family churches.

Alright, I won't be long here but there's an essential foundation, I call them pillars, essential pillars to this unity and cooperation that we have. Essential pillars. Now you could say this different ways, you could slice it up different ways, but I'm convinced based on Ephesians 4 and the balance of biblical teaching those three things have to be united, at least on the important aspects of those things. Your doctrine needs to be alike, you need to be empowered by the same Spirit, and there needs to be a striving of faithfulness and true discipleship. And by the way, if one of those is real, the other two is always gonna be there. So if we're gonna unite and work together with other churches, we've, there's got to be an agreement on doctrine. I'm talking about the cold, hard doctrine you put down on a statement of faith. Obviously we need more than a cold, hard doctrine, that's just stale, cold legalism, but that's gotta be, there's gotta be this.... I mean, if a person doesn't agree with us on the nature and of the person of Christ, we can't work together. We can love them but I'm not gonna ask you to give, give, give to support missions so that you can support somebody to go and preach that Jesus really wasn't the divine Son of God. We gotta agree on doctrine. We've gotta agree on the empowerment of the Spirit, and we've gotta agree on that these churches are all alike striving to live out true discipleship in the things the Bible's clear on, the things that matter.

Paul says in Ephesians 4:1-7, he's talking to one local church but the principles certainly apply out to local churches. "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called," so he's talking about living out something, something that continues on. Now continue on, verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love." Let me pause right there. Grace Life Church of the Shoals, we've known many many years of sweet harmony in this church for one simple reason, that you as individual members have matured to the place where generally speaking you do verse 2, you walk with humility, you deal with one another with gentleness, somebody's a knucklehead but you have patience and you show tolerance in love. In love, look, only the Spirit of God puts that

kind of love in you. You have a new love capacity to put up with those peculiar sheep that drive you crazy. You still love them and you still tolerate them, and understand we're all peculiar to somebody so don't think I'm picking you out. No, you are strange but so am I. You are peculiar but so am I in some ways. Here's my point, but it's that love element, we see something of God's work in their lives, we see something of the regenerating power of the Spirit in their lives, we see something of how they love our Savior and love his work like we do and so we have a humility and a gentleness and a patience one toward another.

Now some Sunday school teacher gets in their class next Sunday and begins teaching that works salvation is the only way to God, now we'll, we'll get active on that real quick. You say, "Wait a minute, Brother Jeff, if you jump on that then you're gonna cause disunity, you're gonna divide." No, no, no, I'm removing the disunity. Are you with me? We unify on truth. That would be the removing of the disunity. A lot, again, a lot, most, most of what folks call today even in church settings as unity – listen – is not the unity of the Spirit, it's the toleration of the flesh. They tolerate fleshly stuff and say, "Oh, we gotta keep the unity." You're not keeping unity, you're dishonoring God and forming a false church with the antichrist spirit in it. So the shepherds have to know, the pastors have to know when something has to be silenced and cut off to maintain the true unity on truth, that is the unity of the Spirit. Boy, I'm running all over the process I want to get to but I just can't hardly help it.

Now Ephesians 4 again, 1 through 7, let's go to verse 3, "being diligent," that's talking about a process again. This is an active, uh, continuous action, uh, expression here, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit," that's the Holy Spirit who gives us truth, "in the bond of peace." Then he gives the foundation stone. "There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 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 was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."

Now let's take these apart, these three things. First of all, I said if we're gonna have unity churches to churches, who are the churches we're gonna have unity with? First of all, those churches that are, number 1, first pillar, grounded in true doctrine. Grounded in true doctrine. I think that's part of what's emphasized when he says there's one Lord. If they don't embrace Christ and what the Scripture teaches about Christ – listen to me – he's not the Jesus of what you feel like he would be like. As C. S. Lewis said, he's not a tame lion. You, you bow before him and yield to who he says he is and what he's like.

If you, now listen, are you listening this morning? Do you know how many times this pastor, I mean, I didn't grow up in church, a time or two we went some but I, I didn't grow up learning much and by the way, there's some benefits to that, it depends what church you grew up in. Do you know how many, do you know how many hundreds of times, I guess you would have to say thousands of times, I've been in the biblical text and I had to repent of my natural inclination of who Jesus was and what he would do and how he would do it. I had to repent of what I really felt he would be like and turn aside of that and embrace what he says he's really like. Can I get an amen? That's what we have to do

every week in church. That's what you do every week in your Bible study or quiet time. We're constantly embracing one Lord, the Lord as he revealed himself to be. And there's some essential doctrines about Christ and salvation we must embrace.

One Lord. One faith. Now in the context that's probably referring to the fact that they all in the Ephesian church believed on the same Lord and it's talking about the moment of faith but – listen to me – the context, everything preceding that is a continuing action exhortation. This is something you didn't just believe, you started being a believer and you kept on believing and walking in it because if you just believed and it didn't go anywhere else, there's no unity. Now there's a basis for unity but you're not gonna live it out because you're not growing at all. But if we're not together on sound biblical doctrine, there can be no unity.

One of the dangers of cooperation in modern evangelicalism and in modern denominations – now listen to me – one of the dangers is that we tend to drift into a lowest common denominator. It's almost like, "Yeah, we know we don't agree here and, yes, we know some don't agree with this, yes, we know some don't agree with this, but at least can we get together for this right here?" We could, we should be looking at the high points of doctrine to come together on, not looking for the lesser things that don't matter and saying, "Well, that's our unity."

For example, in Southern Baptist life, and by the way, there are good godly men in Southern Baptist life, good godly women, brothers that I'll love til death and I will associate with til death but I'm talking about in the system, in the bureaucracy that is Southern Baptist today. There has been the mantra for years that says, "Well, we'll unite together for missions. Well, we ought to keep cooperating together for missions." Brothers and sisters, how are we gonna do missions with someone who doesn't even know what the gospel is? How are we gonna do missions with someone who doesn't understand biblical repentance and biblical faith? How are we gonna do missions with someone who has a radically false if not very weak, shallow view of the nature of the atonement? These doctrines matter. They matter.

How, okay, let's just cooperate together for missions, they say. So we go out to the mission field, we throw all our money at something and there's some real solid brothers and sisters out there but there's a mixture of others who are teaching out-and-out heresy and sometimes it's not because they mean to. You've gotta understand a lot of our folks comes out of terribly weak, shallow churches. My point is you can't cooperate with that. Just saw one of our businessmen just caught my eye just a second ago. He's got a business. They produce a product. If he had a sharp, slick, persuasive guy come into his business but they kept wanting to sell this product over here and he spent 30 years developing this kind of product, he's gonna say, "I love you, man, you're a sweet guy and you're very effective but you're not on board. We can't work together." Doctrine matters.

Now there will always be the struggle with, well, what things are essential and what's non-essential but I would say this to you, the things that are essential are quite obvious and clear. We've gotta be together on doctrine and what we see today in Southern Baptist

life and in many modern denominations, same thing they saw 100 years ago, the same thing they saw 200 years ago, the same thing that was happening 300 years ago, it's always been in this continuum of denominations falling away and then rising up of new groups who were striving to reclaim the old truth and walk in it. What we have today is the institutionalization of compromise. The institutionalization of compromise. Certain compromises crept in over generations and these compromises – now listen to me – these compromises didn't come out of wicked, uh, vile, false teachers, they came from I think sincere men who got a little sloppy with the Bible and began to put into practice certain things to make their work more effective and make it more successful, and then they began to focus more and more on that works, that works, people like that, and then when they got over here, they, they're starting to almost no resemblance with the truth they used to stand on 100 years ago. And it's slow and it's subtle.

I think that's been one of the easy things for me not growing up in church, is when I walked into the church and opened the Bible, I thought, "What's going on?" You just, you wouldn't believe the trouble I caused as a young minister and God knows I didn't mean to. But I'd go knock on the pastor's door somewhere and I would sit down and think, "Why do you do this? And why do you do this? And why is this allowed and why is this allowed and why is this allowed?" As God is my witness, to this day I've never had one of them just say, "You're wrong." I've had them to say, "You're right but that won't work, Jeff. That'll cause problems. People don't view it that way. People just... We know, I know, I know it's in all of our historic statements of faith, I know our forefathers really lived that but we just can't do that."

I'm not setting myself up for some kind of hero because I'm not. I was just young and stupid and I mean stupid. How many of you are in here young? Don't raise your hand. We know who you are. Now if you're young, are you listening to your pastor this morning? Now you know I'm kinda sarcastic and halfway tongue-in-cheek but this is true. If you're young, you're stupid. Are you hearing me? And every young person in here, you need to go look in your mirror every morning and say, "I'm stupid because I'm young. I'm thankful for the things I have learned so far but I'm still young and I'm still stupid." That's why you parents are double stupid if you follow your children in important areas like where to go to church and things like that. But that's, I'm just, that's rock solid truth you just heard. That's not being funny. That's not being crude. That's truth. The Bible says foolishness is bound up, there's just a lot of it crammed in there and it's tight, foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, then it says, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from them.

The point is we're all growing and as a young pastor, I had way more zeal than I had wisdom or common sense and I would just kept pushing because, folks, I was seeing things in the churches I started attending after my conversion, that weren't way over here kinda difficult, narrow, you know, we just kind of had to dissect the Scriptures and find out where you might possibly...these were glaringly obvious compromises. And we always have some of those but it was the embracing and allowing, even almost bragging that we have them, the institutionalization of compromise along with the institutionalization of false doctrine.

Now listen to this statement. I think they used to put this on the screen before the service. The work of missions should be the object of cooperation among local churches. Doctrinal truth must be the base of cooperation among local churches. Did you hear that? Missions is the object but we can't get together on let's do missions, we must get together on what is truth because the truth is what we're taking to the world. The Psalmist wrote, "Send out thy light and thy truth." We cannot take a lie to the world, we must know the truth and that's why Paul commanded his young understudy pastor, Titus, to guard sound doctrine. It wasn't a suggestion, it was a command.

Church, are you listening to me this morning? Your pastor is passionate about guarding sound doctrine for this flock. I mean, I'm patient with young guys that may mess up something here and there because I know their heart, but if anything – now listen to me – in the tiniest way looks like it's about be taking root, I will come at it... I'm trying to think of the biggest bomb I can think of. With an atomic bomb, that ages me, doesn't it? I mean, we're just not gonna do it. Are you hearing me?

Now again, understand the balance. We've learned to be patient, sweet and kind every way we can because, because sometimes you've got a good brother and he lost his mind one vacation and bought Beth Moore's book and he comes in and he starts talking stuff and me and the elders start going... But he's a good brother. We don't just run out there and get him in a headlock, ride him to the ground. We pray. We watch. A couple weeks later he's bumped into two or three other brothers who said, "Have you lost your mind?" And he says, "Yeah, that was kinda goofy, wasn't it?" And he goes on. See, that's what happens in a mature church. You don't have to run, beat everything up all the time but you still have to be vigilant.

Well, what I'm talking about if we're gonna unite together with other churches, they have to be all grounded in sound doctrine. And by the way, that rules out a bunch immediately. Now I want you to listen to what I'm saying. That even rules out a bunch of churches with good men as pastors who have tried to do their best but you know what these pastors are fighting today? I mean the good brothers who are trying to do it right? They fight, they have such mountains of obstacles against them. So though we would love that pastor, we may not can do missions with him because the embodiment of what he's actually about is so contrary to sound doctrine it would pollute what we're about. So we love him and we would help him individually but we can't cooperate for missions. There has to be enough of an embrace in the body on sound doctrine that we can work together.

Last time I looked and it's been a while, we had over 200,000 viewers of my small treatise on why we were leaving the Southern Baptist Convention. 200,000 and some of those viewers were by groups so I don't know. And by the way, I, I, that was not premeditated. I didn't even know I was gonna say what I said when I went to church that morning. God just got on me with it and I couldn't let it go and I knew we as a church family had long long long long ago disassociated ourselves in any real active way with Southern Baptists. And can I back up from that? Long long ago, they disassociated from us and we would ask why won't you associate with us? They would pick out something

that's absolutely false and doesn't matter. "Well, y'all have a plurality of elders." Well, so did Paul's churches in the New Testament. And so did our Baptist churches of 100-150 years ago. But they, they would divide, what I'm telling you, they divide over things that don't matter, things the Bible has some flexibility.

So they pushed us out and finally we said, "Okay, since you've pretty much pushed us out and you don't want to associate with us, we've decided we love you, we know there's good brothers and sisters out there that love the Lord, we love you but we're just not gonna send our money anymore. We're gonna send our money to the mission work God's given us to do." So we've had a lot of interest in our position on why we don't think we should cooperate with a great big machine called Southern Baptist. Well, if you just went to the churches and sat down and looked at the doctrine that was being taught and embrace, sometimes some good brothers who are doing the best they can but nevertheless the doctrine is very unsound, you'd understand why. And since I've already picked on Beth Moore once, and I love Beth Moore, but she's a woman out of control. She's a woman out from under godly authority. She ought to be sitting down with godly elders and saying, "Am I missing it on my doctrine here?" Because she's missing it bad. Are you listening to me? When Beth Moore becomes the most popular preacher in your denomination, you've got serious trouble. Not that we don't love her. Not that God has never used her. First of all, she has no business preaching in God's church. That's the office given to men only. Secondly, her doctrines are very in error. Her view of God's guidance and direction is, is way out of balance. If you view God leading you the way she does, every one of us could come up with God said, God said, God said, God said, and do anything we want in life instead of going to the book. This is what God said right here.

So now I know all that's old news to us. We've been there for a long time but I'm gonna talk about the Pastor's Training Institute probably next week and tie this all together but I want you to be reaffirming with your pastor we're gonna be kind, we're gonna be loving, we're gonna be compassionate, and we're gonna understand that there are some real sincere and genuine brothers and sisters who are caught in something that privately they wish they weren't caught in, just to be honest. But to do missions, we must know those local churches are grounded in sound doctrine. Can I get an amen on that?