

THREE PILLARS OF CHURCH UNITY

Part One

A. Good News:

1. Bought by Christ's blood (Acts 20:28)
2. The Family of God (Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 2:18-20, 22)
3. The Holy Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:20-22)
4. The Bride (Ephesians 5:23-32; Revelation 19:7-9)
5. The Body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Colossians 1:18)
6. The Eternal Community of God (Ephesians 1:19; Revelation 21:1-4)

B. Bad News: Church is a messy community of God. We are not yet perfect and mature.

- ❖ **Romans 14:13**, "Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."
- ❖ **1 Corinthians 1:11**, "For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers."
- ❖ **2 Corinthians 12:20**, "For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder."
- ❖ **Galatians 5:15, 26**, "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another"... "Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another."
- ❖ **Ephesians 4:31**, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."
- ❖ **Philippians 4:2**, "I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord."
- ❖ **Colossians 3:8**, "But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth."... **13**, "Bear with each other."
- ❖ **James 4:1**, "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?"

Facts to consider:

- i. There is no Christian life without being a part of Christ's church.

- ii. Christ’s church is both beautiful and messy. We all have problems and we are a problem. Because of complicated personalities, immature conduct, unwise communication, unhealthy expectations, and lack of mutual understanding—there is always scope for conflicts.
- iii. Conflicts are necessary in relationships without which we cannot grow in love and towards spiritual maturity.
- iv. Conflicts are opportunities for us to live a Gospel-centered life. Consider the Gospel, which is an initiation of God to reconcile us to Himself through Jesus Christ. We must pursue reconciliation because of the Gospel.
- v. Keep in mind that conflicts are also opportunities to the devil to sow seeds of divisions in the church.
 - ❖ **Ephesians 4:26**, “Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.”
- vi. To face and resolve conflicts takes self-denial, courage, wisdom, patience and diligence. Unless our heart is for God, for the Gospel, and for the church, we don’t take efforts to pursue peace, unity and reconciliation.

So, how do we live at peace and walk together in unity? Here are three pillars of unity (this is not exhaustive).

I. HONEST CONFRONTATION

Problem: Interpersonal conflicts (if you are offended)

A. Unbiblical reaction:

- Be silent and suffer (fear of confrontation)
- Violent reaction (anger, attack)
- Dissolve from relationship and mind your own business
- Avoid addressing the problem because it is painful and maintain superficial relationship
- Gossip
- Assume time will heal all things
- Pray without dealing with the problem

B. Biblical Reaction:

- ❖ **Matthew 18:15**, “If your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault**, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”
- ❖ **Luke 17:3**, “If your brother sins, **rebuke** him.”
- ❖ **Leviticus 19:17-18**, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but **you shall reason frankly** with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance

or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

- ❖ **Proverbs 27:5-6**, “Better is **open rebuke** than hidden love. Faithful are the **wounds** of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.”

Point: Conflicts and offense are unavoidable in the church. But do not quickly give up on your relationship. If you want to please God and obey His Word, then pursue restoration.

C. Practical Steps:

- i. Examine the issue whether it is too important. Don't be oversensitive and try to confront people in everything you feel offended.
 - ❖ **Proverbs 19:11**, “Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.” **NLT**, “Sensible people control their temper; they earn respect by overlooking wrongs.” OVERLOOK IS NOT TAKING IT SERIOUSLY TO HEART AND REFLECTING ON IT.
 - Is it bringing disgrace to God's Name?
 - Is it damaging the offender's relationship with the church and family?
 - Is it damaging the offender's witness to the Gospel, a stumbling block to unbelievers?
 - Is it damaging the offender's character and his testimony in the church?
 - Is it damaging your relationship with the offender?
- ii. Examine your logs before picking up specks in others: **Matthew 7:3-5**, “Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.”
 - ❖ **Example:** Before complaining that others in your church do not love you, examine yourself whether you love others in your church?
- iii. Unless unavoidable, do not confront over phone or email or text message or through another person. Make every effort to confront in person, face-to-face.
 - ❖ **Matthew 18:15**, “If your brother sins against you, **go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone.** If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”
- iv. Pray to God to confront the offender with love and wisdom. Don't address the issue with anger and malice. Ask God not to confront to vomit your hurt and tear apart the offender but to win the person to have a peaceful relationship. The goal of confrontation is restoration and reconciliation.
 - ❖ **Galatians 6:1**, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him **in a spirit of gentleness.**”

❖ **Ephesians 4:31-32**, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.**”

➤ Right Words, Gentle Tone, and Good Body Language.

- v. Don't be too quick and don't delay too much to address the issue. Find the appropriate time, especially when the person is in a listening mood.
- vi. When you confront the offender, first affirm how you value the person and your relationship with him/her.
- vii. Evaluate whether your thoughts are true by asking questions for clarity. Get an objective picture. Don't jump to hasty conclusions and quickly judge intentions/hearts.

❖ **James 1:19-20**, “Know this, my beloved brothers: **let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger**; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

❖ **Proverbs 20:5**, “The purpose in a man's heart is like deep water, but **a man of understanding will draw it out.**”

- viii. Express how you felt without accusing or attacking the person.

❖ Let the word “I” (personal feeling) dominate your conversation rather than “You” (accusation).

❖ Also, “*Always* and *Never* are the words you must always be careful never to use.”

- ix. If the person is not convinced, give some time to the person to pray and reflect.
- x. If things are not yet resolved, by informing the offender, using the words of Christ as your basis, go further and involve more people:

❖ **Matthew 18:16**, “But if he does not listen (*don't leave it there*), **take one or two others along with you (mature and unbiased)**, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses.”

- Although Paul wrote this in the context of lawsuits, wisdom is found in his words, “Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers...?” (**1 Corinthians 6:5**)
- I don't claim that the majority is always true but if you want to be wise and grow mature in your spiritual life, make every effort to give careful thought to the counsel of the majority, even if your feelings disagree. Don't be self-opinionated.

❖ **Matthew 18:17**, “If he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you *as* a Gentile and a tax collector.”

- This doesn't mean standing in church service and announcing publicly but informing the elders to function as moderators to deal with the issue.

Ken Sande, author of “The Peacemaker”, says: Treating someone as a nonbeliever serves three important purposes. **First**, revoking (removing) the person's membership in the church (Lord's supper and ministries) prevents the Lord from being dishonored if that person continues to act in blatantly sinful ways (Rom. 2:23-24). **Second**, other believers are protected from being led astray by a bad example or divisive behavior (Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:1-6). **Third**, treating someone as a nonbeliever may help the rebellious person to realize the seriousness of his or her sin, turn from it, and be restored to God. The intention in treating others as nonbelievers is not to injure them or punish them, but rather to help them see the seriousness of their sin and their need for repentance. (*The Peacemaker*, pg. 194)

❖ **Matthew 18:20**, “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” (JESUS ENDORSES THIS METHOD AND IS WITH US WHEN WE FOLLOW IT)

Caution: Don't give an excuse to ignore all this process in order not to make the situation ugly (don't try to be smarter than Jesus). If Christians and the churches follow the confrontation method of Jesus, God's people would become extremely careful in their speech and conduct.

Note: This method works effectively in a biblical local church. That's why we must be committed to a biblical local church.