

# The Spirit Building Up the Church

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We're going to talk about Spirit empowered body life and I thought it was kind of interesting, you know, I'll deal a little bit with this in a moment too how we don't believe in targeting an audience, selecting a demographic of some community and "going after them to build a church around some subjective worldly definition of a certain type of person." But I thought this conference is a targeted conference. We very much are targeting pastors and church leaders who really care about the local church pleasing and glorifying God. If you just want a conference where there is great preaching and not really targeted that way, there are other places you can go. I think there is great preaching here, I think godly preaching and good preaching but we are about the local church and I always go back to my own pilgrimage and think about the struggles and the difficulties we had here and particularly I was having, striving to reform the church, to build it up, and often I would go places and hear just one nugget, just one insight that was the piece of the puzzle I needed to hang on and gain strength and think, "That's what I need to do." And so I hope this message today perhaps will do that for some of you.

I want to talk about Spirit empowered body life and, again, it's one of those topics that you just have to wrestle with all that you need to leave out because of time constraints and certainly you could look at the Spirit gifting all members so that when the body collectively, the local church body is together, the body is built up by the individual members ministering in their spiritual gifts. But actually, I want to go to the foundation under that. I think there are twin pillars that Spirit empowered body life really depends upon and that is my first main point: the Spirit empowers love and unity. Those are the twin pillars that I think everything else as far as functioning, ministry, exhortation, encouragement, it all comes, flows out of the fountain, if you will, of true Spirit wrought love and unity in the corporate local church body.

In 2 Corinthians 3:1-2 Paul says, "Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?" Here it is, "But you are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men." So here again, I used this in my earlier message but Paul says, "The congregation, you the congregation are my testimony. I am inviting people to come in and read my book, my local church congregation." And Pastor, I would challenge you, please write good books. Good books have helped me immensely and maybe in God's grace I will be able to do that one day but make sure your primary book, the message you give to the world is a healthy local church, a God-centered local church, a church that is Spirit blessed and Spirit

empowered. And when we open the doors of the local church and we invite the world in effect to look in, what do we hope that they see? As they read the testimony of our local church, what do they discover? Well, I think there must be two things there that are humanly impossible: they must see true love and true unity. There must be a scripturally defined love and unity and a spiritually empowered demonstration of love and unity. Both of those are very important: scripturally defined love and unity and a spiritually empowered love and unity. Those always have to go together because the Spirit is not going to empower this phony, pseudo, gushy sentimentality, love stuff that we see in a lot of collectivities and bodies and a lot of churches. Spiritual love and unity is very, very different from the world. It might look the same outwardly but it's radically different than the world's concepts of love and unity. John MacArthur is right, the greatest need in the church today is the sermon. There is so much false counterfeit stuff that is going on in the church that is not of God and to the immature, undiscerning eye it looks like the real thing but it is not at all.

Now here is something: if we can have Spirit defined love and unity functioning in the church, scripture defined and Spirit empowered love and unity, then we have something that is astounding to the world. It's foreign to them. They look at and they think, "How can that be?" And they recognize that is impossible to reproduce. Just a few verses to show you how the Lord puts the priority on these within the body. Jesus says in John 13:34 and 35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also," here it is again, "love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Not some kind of generic liberal interpretive humanitarian love for mankind. Christians love mankind that's true but there is a unique God wrought, passionate, caring and loving for the body of Christ that he said, "That's the mark. That's the mark. That is what makes you different." The world doesn't have that. John 15:8 and 9, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love." And again, it doesn't mean a generic love for humanity though that would be true, it is that special love we have for each other. The Bible says, "As far as it's possible do good to all men but especially for the household of the faith."

There is a love for the church. Now when I talk about the church all through this message, I am talking about the local body of baptized believers. In Matthew 28 when Jesus talks about that he'll come back and there will be this separation of the sheep from the goats and he will talk about the sheep were those, "Who visited me when I was in prison and clothed me when I was destitute and fed me when I was hungry," and they'll say, "Lord, when did we do that?" and he said, "Every time you did it to one of the least of these my brethren," not when you did the kind things for mankind but the fact that you were wanting to be united to and still loved the publicly persecuted saints of God. That showed that you were one of mine. The love and connection you had with the persecuted saints proved that you're the genuine article. Love and unity.

A couple of thoughts on unity now. I read a couple of references. John 17:21-23, high priestly prayer, Jesus says that, "That they may all be one," there it is, unity, "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." now isn't that interesting? If they're one, if they're united, the world will believe that you sent me. Pretty powerful, isn't it? It is an interesting thing. He says, "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity." God cares a lot about this and then again, "That the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."

So he makes this connection when the local church body has this loving unity and, by the way, I don't think you can take these apart. If you have true love, you've got unity. If you have true biblical unity, there is love there. So, I'm going to just throw them together all the time but the Lord says, "The world sees the truth. The world sees God when the church has the true love and unity only I can enable that." Ephesians 4:3, "Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Not just a unity, the unity. The unity we have is not a unity it's not one of several, it's not like, "Well, our church over here, we're united around these things and we're this kind of church so we unite around these things." No, no, there is only one unity, it's the unity of the Spirit. He does something in us and causes us to be the united local church body of Christ. Ephesians 4:13, it talks about us all attaining to the unity of the faith and, of course, that deals with the doctrines we hold. Though I will not deal with that much at all, certainly truth about unity and love flows out of sound doctrine, sound teaching. So, this is a supernatural creation of God within the corporate body. We are a people who are to walk supernaturally naturally. We are to do this supernatural thing as a natural part of our everyday, interactive, dynamic body of life. These two are always working together and they are always wrought by the Spirit of God.

Now I found it interesting in John 13 where Jesus said, "A new commandment I am giving to you." Now, why would he say new? I mean isn't it not an old commandment that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves? Hasn't that been around forever? I think the point Jesus is making is: when you're regenerate of the Spirit, there is a new thing that has happened in you. You now have a new capacity to know and walk in love for each other that you did not have before. Now, so he's saying, "Walk out this new reality and show the difference I have made in your lives." It is new from that perspective. So, this love and this unity are two things that cannot exist, even cannot be attempted, apart from the Spirit's empowerment and that's where I want to leave you in this conference. I want to leave you hopelessly dependent on the Spirit of God to make your church the real thing. I want to strip from you everything else so that you leave saying, "Oh dear Spirit of God, if you don't make this congregation the genuine, loving, Christ-centered congregation it ought to be we're sunk."

You know, our world has so many groups, so many communities, you might call them collectivities, and they seem to exhibit a love and a unity. I mean, we have everything from southern redneck militias to homosexual Hollywood groups who claim "Hey, we're one. We love each other. We have a great unity together." Doesn't it just kind of repulse you to see the left wing Hollywood crowd? And they see each other and it's huggy, huggy, kissy, kissy. You know, it's just, "Aw, you know, we just love each other." It's

nothing but a bunch of hollow gushy sentimentality but what grieves me is a lot of churches, that is all they have and they call it God and I'm telling you its blasphemy to call that to God. Spiritual love is very different. By the way, spiritual love isn't so touchy, touchy either. There is a lot of that goes on in the church and it's just not healthy just to be honest. I'm not throwing out a bunch of gauntlets and a bunch of strict rules, some people are just generally more hugging people than others and a good hug is kind of nice every now and then but what I am saying is a whole lot of this...I like what Manly B. and old Southern Baptist preacher used to say, "It's just soulish. It's not spiritual, it's soulish." I mean, our world is so much about everybody is going to get along, going to be tolerant, we're going to have this unity. We now even have the politically correct speech police monitoring professional football locker rooms afraid that somebody is going to say something and hurt somebody else's feelings. And so we have to make sure there is not disunity and nobody is hurt. I mean we've got a 300 and something pound football player in the public media who is burdened because he has been bullied. Are you kidding me? What kind of weak, wimpy culture do we have? There's this massive movement of, "Let's all be unified," and with just new laws and new legislations, new regulations so that nobody gets their feelings hurt.

I thought about this, I don't know, it was eons ago when I played football in high school but I thought if they had one twenty minute recording of what went on in my high school football locker room, they would arrest all of us before sunset for bullying and all kinds of stuff. I mean, it's crazy in there, guys. Can you imagine this effeminate, wimpy spirit coming into a football locker room? "Y'all be sweet to each other now." I'm just blown away but I want to get to a bigger point, there is just this movement of unity. "We've just got to love. We've just got to all get along together." A whole lot of this in our world is because the men in this country are no longer men, they're wimps. Our country has been taken over by a bunch of effeminate men and feminist women and we're letting this little touchy, feely, get your little feelings hurt stuff everywhere. Listen, there isn't a place for meanness and bullying, that is wrong, I understand that but heavens to Betsey, some of that is called grow up. But here is what we find, we find this striking reality and that is though there seems to be more pushed laws, legislation, seminars, sensitivity training, you call it, to get everybody together, disunity just keeps spewing up everywhere. Unloveliness just keeps spewing up everywhere. Do you know why that is? That is because the world lacks the two essential foundations for love and unity: truth and the power of the Holy Spirit. They don't have it. They don't have it. There is something in them that wants unity but they cannot produce it.

So this is a great opportunity for a true church. A true church can know and walk in these two things and demonstrate these two things because Jesus said, "All men will know you are my disciples by the love you have for one another." What is he saying? They have something in them that wants it but they can't obtain it, it is impossible to them but you have what can enable it, the Spirit of God. So model it and men will know you have God in your congregation. By the way, Jesus said, "All men will know you are my disciples by the love you have one for another." He did not say, "All men will know you are my disciples by your doctrine." Be careful about some of the brethren or at least professing brethren, who dot all the i's and cross all the t's on reformed theology. Are you

understanding there is some real crazies out there who are five point Calvinists? Be discerning. You will not know them by their doctrine, you will know them by the love they have one for another, he said.

Sadly, there is just so much counterfeit love and unity in the church that many if not most congregations, what they are calling love and unity looks more like what the world would call love and unity. There are two key reasons why most professing congregations have counterfeit love and unity. Number 1: they have too many if not a majority of their membership who is unregenerate. I mean, one of the greatest things I learned pastoring this church was I cannot turn goats into sheep. I just had to keep preaching and preaching and preaching and describing and teaching and preaching and teaching the truth of the gospel, the truth of genuine conversion until slowly and finally the regenerate outnumbered the unregenerate. You say, "Pastor, how long has that taken?" 33 years so far. Does that encourage you? An unregenerate membership.

Secondly, carnal acting believers. Sometimes a good brother can just get carnal in his actions and he is not loving and he is divisive but those kind of guys if they are really regenerate, will respond to a loving rebuke or correction and we have to deal with that sometimes. Remember the disciples in Luke 22:2, they are in there debating about who's the greatest. I don't know if you've noticed but when guys start debating about who is the greatest, disunity follows that. Well, they had to be rebuked so sometimes there are good brothers that just need correction. I thought about the perfect illustration of how a false concept of love and unity that is, a love and unity that is not scripturally based and not Spirit empowered, how it unfolds in the church. We all see this and we saw it so clearly here when you deal with a topic like church discipline. Here is what you will often hear in a typical church that is filled with a false concept of love and unity, "Well, we can't discipline them because that would be unloving or if we act on church discipline, that will cause disunity in the church." And that is just their logical...they are saying the right words, love and unity, and a whole lot of it is, as a matter of fact, myself when I first heard that, I thought about that and said, "Well, I guess that's right." But then you get to thinking about it, again, church unity is not a unity, it is the unity and when there is unrepented of sin in the church, the unity of the church is already destroyed because the Spirit is grieved. It is spiritual unity. It is the unity of the Spirit and if he is being sinned against, the unity of God and the church is already disrupted. It's already broken because unrepented of sin is allowed in the camp. What most churches today call love and unity is toleration of the flesh, not unity of the Spirit. Spiritual power then leaves the church because God's Spirit is not going to bless where he is grieved and sinned against.

So, spiritual power leaves the church and the church is left only with fleshly power and worldly gimmicks who "grow the church." But truth defined, Spirit empowered love and unity is what distinguishes the church from all other groups and all other organizations. I pictured it in my mind studying as this, the door of the church's witness needs to swing clearly and cleanly so the world can see the truth of God and the two hinges that enable that witness to swing clearly and precisely is the hinge of love and the hinge of unity. If those two hinges aren't working right, the door jams and the world can't see the glory of God.

Well, let me go to a second point, II. Love and unity, of course, brings glory to God. We want the door of the church to swing open wide and invite the world to look in. Paul said, "You're my letter known and read of all men." Look, we want the world to look in and as they look in we want to remind ourselves that God is passionate about his glory. Boy, you could spend two hours just going through the text looking at some of this but 2 Samuel 2:14 after David had sinned with Bathsheba, killing Bathsheba's husband Uriah, the prophet confronts him and the prophet basically says, "Your sin is forgiven," but then he says, "However, because by this deed you have given an occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme the child also that is born to you shall surely die." In other words, God says, "My name and my fame has been marred by this and I care deeply about my reputation." 1 Corinthians 5:1, the apostle writing to the church at Corinth said that, "There is actually reported immorality among you and immorality of such a kind that that does not even exist among the Gentiles." Now, what is the point that Paul is making? He said, "You've actually got corruption and serious sin in the church that even the non-church world is ashamed about. You're hurting my reputation. You are marring my name and my fame in the community." God cares deeply about his glory. Ephesians 3:10, "So that the manifold wisdom of God," now listen to this, "that the manifold wisdom of God," manifold, multifaceted and varied beauties of God's wisdom, "might be made known through the church." This is grabbing me this last week, "through the church to the rulers and authority in heavenly places." God says, "I want the spiritual man to look on my church and be able to see the manifold glories of my wisdom." God cares deeply about his own glory and through his church. Ephesians 3:21, "To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen." In this statement, he puts the church bringing him glory side by side with his Son bringing him glory, both for time and eternity. I am in no way equating the church with Christ, but the church is the centerpiece of Christ's work and the outshining of Christ's glory because it is his work.

Now, I can't help Jesus. He is perfect already. Jesus is not being sanctified. He is not being glorified, he is glorified but the church in God's providence is now under human shepherds hopefully led and empowered by the Spirit of God and we do have a responsibility to work with and lead and shepherd our flocks to the end that our God gets the most glory possible through his bride. And the twin pillars of love and unity are essential that God is rightfully seen and noted. His power is seen and his beauty and his wisdom is made manifest when we walk in those two twin pillars.

If you would, look real quick over to Acts, chapter 5. Acts 5, you will remember this familiar story of God killing Ananias and Sapphira. They are hypocrites. They got in on the bandwagon of, "Hey, we are all selling all of our goods to give to the ministry to help one another." A lot of poor folks there. A lot of folks needed food and the church, God's brought a great revival and Ananias and Sapphira lie and say they were giving everything like others had done but they were keeping back some of it. God kills both of them so there is a purifying affect in the church. Notice, the result of this, look at verse 13 if you will, "But none of the rest dared to associate with them." None of the rest dared to associate with them, that means that there was a large group of attenders that were coming and God used this episode with Ananias and Sapphira to purge away, to thin

down the numbers, if you will, to make the body more purified. But then look at verse 12, "At the hands of the apostles many signs and wonders were taking place among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's portico." That is unity. The church is coming together in a tighter oneness and a tighter love and a tighter unity. Now, again my natural inclination would be, if I'm in a revival to the dimensions of Pentecost and radical, miraculous things are happening, folks are being converted by the thousands, I'm going to put off church discipline for a while but God doesn't. Right in the middle of it, he cleans his church and the result is they are all in one accord in Solomon's portico. Now, look at another result here the last part of verse 13, "however, the people held them in high esteem." Notice that. There is now a growing esteem of the world for God's church. God is being glorified even beyond the perception of the people who know and love God, even out in the world, God is being glorified. God cares very, very deeply about his own glory and to keep his church pure and one and united so that he might be glorified is high on his priority list.

Next, III. Man empowered division abolished. Man empowered division abolished. I use man empowered because we're talking about the Spirit's power but when man gets involved with his wisdom and he begins to create divisions in the church, it's got to be stopped. Here's a good example of this in Galatians 2 and once again, a good example that good brothers, can get off track and just need to get back on track. They don't need to be thrown away. They are not necessarily disciplined and forbidden but there needs to be help brought to what they are doing and how they are doing it. Look at Galatians 2:11, "But when Cephas," Peter, "came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision." So here Peter is forming two different groups in one location. We're going to have the contemporary crowd meet at one hour and the division of the church, they can meet the other hour. Did I miss apply that?

"The rest of the Jews," verse 13, "joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. But when I," this is Paul, "saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel," that is a powerful statement, "I said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" Here is the key point: Paul rebukes Peter because Peter fell into the fear of man when these legalistic believers but from a Jewish background, come to the Gentile believers in Antioch and they said, "You know, we believe you can come to Christ but really we need to be two separate groups. It's just more effective that way. We'll reach more people that way. We won't offend Jews and we can get the gospel to them and it would be more comfortable for the Gentiles when we get to talk to them." But here is what Paul said, Paul says, "When you do that, you are not walking straightforward with the truth of the gospel. You're missing what the gospel is all about when you form these men inspired divisions even if it is to the end of 'reaching others for Christ. You missed the whole thing,'" he's saying. Maybe we could say Peter was just ahead of his day. Peter was just coloring outside the lines. Peter is just thinking outside of the box. No, Peter fell into sin. He is missing the truth of the gospel, that the gospel radically transforms people so that people

who do not like each other in any way shape or fashion in the world get over it and love each other and become united in Christ. Now listen: when churches intentionally are divisive for pragmatic means, they miss the truth of the gospel. It's powerful.

I just jotted down all of the things I am hearing. In one church I heard about, it has three services for three different kinds of people because those three different kinds of people are not happy with anybody but the kind of people they want to be around. They have a traditional church service, a contemporary church service and then a blended church service. I asked the staff to ask me about some of the church names that are out there that are kind of suspect. Now, I know there are some good brothers in some churches that are probably doing right that have unfortunate names. Don't be legalistic about this but some of these names are really... Catalyst Church, Elevation Church, Cowboy Church, Fun Church. I didn't know there was one. My music guy knew about that, typical music guy, knew all about it. Fun Church. Just teasing, Brother Tom. And then these slogans: a church without walls. Brother, if you don't have some walls, you are not a church. You can't join the church unless God puts you in it and we erect walls to keep out those that God has not added to his church. A church without walls? This is another phrase: we want to make church appealing. These consumer driven approaches I think often are sin driven approaches. What we need is a truth driven approach to the church. What we need is Spirit empowered body life that brings all kinds of people together in one spirit to one gospel for the glory of God.

I mean, when we target a group and there has been a lot about this through the years and I know you're not in that camp but I just want to tell you about the spiritual principle that is involved in this. When you target a demographic say, "We're going to define this certain kind of people we are going to try to reach and that will help us reach them." But listen, by targeting one group, are you not leaving out others? What that actually is, it is church growth by disunity. That is really what that is. We want to cut off other groups because we are targeting this one group. Friend, that is radically opposite of the truth of the gospel. The gospel brings the most unlikely people together and that shows the world the manifold wisdom of God. That is what we want to be about. Your church, Brother David said it right, the world shouldn't be able to look in at our church and explain it. They should look in and say, "How do you all get along?" Paul said to Peter, "You are not walking straight with the truth of the gospel. You're not walking out the reality and the power of what the gospel accomplishes. It brings all kinds of prejudices and preferences to die so that men can get together." I mean, you mean to tell me that the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ is your all and your only hope? The infinite power of the Holy Spirit has changed you? You are a new creature in Christ Jesus? You have been quickened from the dead? You are born again and with all that going on in your heart you are not able to die to the selfish prejudices and preferences that you lived in before you were converted? Are you kidding me?

I pick on the Cowboy Church, I know I do but you mean to tell me you can't go to church if they don't let you dress up like a cowboy? I'm serious. These are grown men and I know them during the week, they are not cowboys. They dress up like cowboys to go to church. What are they saying to the world? "The Spirit of God has changed me into a



cowboy." What is this stuff? It is not walking straightforward with the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is boy down here who has a big old rodeo buckle on and he is a cowboy and the guy right beside him is the president of the bank and they love each other. That is the truth of the gospel. That is the truth of the gospel.

Now look, we all have preferences and that's fine and some of your churches aren't like mine and that's okay. I'm not worried about that. We have preferences but listen, people who must have their preference, people who need to have church done to suit their subjective preferences and can't get along with others, show no evidence of the transforming power of the gospel and when we see these churches advertising themselves with worldly modifiers, all these words before church: contemporary church, seeker friendly church, whatever it is. Isn't that basically an announcement that our gospel is so impotent that we cannot get over our selfish and worldly preferences and prejudices to fellowship with believers who are unlike us? Isn't that what that says? I believe it is nothing less than a blasphemous denial of the gospel and the power of the Holy Spirit to transform lives. The name Relevant Church, again don't get hung up on the name, it's the principle I want to talk about, Relevant Church. Listen to me, if the biblical gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ preached in the power of the holy Spirit is not relevant to you, then you go to hell. That's it. I don't mean that in an ugly spirit, you go to hell. If that's not relevant to you, I can't make that relevant. If that is not relevant to you, I can't polish it up and pack it up any other way.

Well, when we began our reforms here we picked out a little logo of two crosses. If you haven't heard my message on two crosses, you might want to get it. I think we have a pamphlet on it. You know why there are two crosses? Somebody said, "Well, I thought there were three crosses?" I said, "No, that guy went to hell, we don't want his cross up there." Listen, there has always and only been two crosses in Christianity. There is the Savior's cross and the saint's cross. The Savior's cross is the big cross, he is the center of it all. The smaller dependent cross is ours and when we began to "market Grace Life Church" here is what we were saying, "We want people to come here who are going to take up a cross and follow Jesus." Is that relevant? I don't know but that is our message.

Well, IV. and I'm done: a renewal of what matters. We'll look at Ephesians 2 and we'll be done. Ephesians 2. I went into an airport in a major city and if you haven't been to one of the brand new modern airports, it's unbelievable. I mean, you just start pulling into the place, immaculate landscaping. Man, the architects, the engineers, traffic flows beautifully. The architecture is unbelievable. I park my car and everything is working great. I go into the terminal and again it's just a masterpiece work of architecture. the most modern computerized whatever they call them things out front where you don't have to have a ticket anymore. Just everything is immaculate. So impressive. A wonderful experience. I get a meal and man, it's like a restaurant. You get in a five star restaurant somewhere anywhere just everything is spot on, spotless beautiful. I finally make it to the gate and I'm going down the connection to my plane and I see my plane and I realize it's an old 1936 DC3. Looks like it hasn't been serviced or cleaned since 1936. There is rust on the wheels, there is fluid running out of one of the engines, the tail rudder is bent to the side because it won't go back straight anymore, the paint is chipped and faded badly,

the fuselage is dented with numerous cracks. I had a fearful spirit, if you will. Walk into the plane there's no carpet on the floor, it stinks, it's musty, it's dirty, it's damp feeling. Now, of course that didn't happen but if that did happen, here is what you'd say, "They put a lot of attention on everything but what really matters here? I mean, they are just knocking themselves out on lots of stuff in this whole airport thing but what really matters has been radically neglected." Brothers, according to God, what really matters is that the church body walk in scripturally defined, spiritually empowered love and unity. God said, "When that's there, the world will see me." And God says, "I'm all about the world seeing me." You get to get in on God glorifying himself through his church and we need to do the best we can at it.

Now, right quick in Ephesians 2, beginning in verse 11, Paul writes to these Ephesian believers and he says, "Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called 'Uncircumcision' by the so-called 'Circumcision,' which is performed in the flesh by human hands - remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." Now in verses 11 and 12, he basically says, "Now you Gentiles were so very, very, very far away from God and any aspect of salvation. There was just the greatest division in time and eternity that existed. You're far off, I mean, the Jew's at least had the fathers and the prophets and the temple and the portraits of Christ and the figures of Christ and the prophecies but the Gentiles had none of that. I mean, there was just this massive wall of separation between you and God." Verse 13, "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near," unity, unity, "by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace." So in the person of Jesus Christ and through the power of the regenerating work of the Spirit of God, the greatest disunity that exists is healed. Man comes to God.

Now, he goes on to a more horizontal thing here. That was the vertical relationship, man and God, but now look at verse 14, the last part, "And he made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." In other words, Jew and Gentile now both come to God the same way. Verse 15, "By abolishing in His flesh the enmity," that's the enmity between Jew and Gentile, "which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man," unity, "thus establishing peace." Verse 16, "and might reconcile them both in one," unity, "body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were far away," that's the Gentiles, "and peace to those who were near," that's the Jews, "for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father." Notice how this all happens, it happens through the Spirit. Did you get that? This happens through one Spirit. Verse 22, "In whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit." I think we missed that. God performs this miraculous unifying thing through his spiritual work.

So Paul says first of all, there is this radical division between God and man that's healed through the work and the merits of Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit and the greatest division humanly on earth, Jew and Gentile, is healed through the power of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. God is really big on this thing of coming together as one in

truth. Now, brothers and sisters, we can't ever, ever, ever make unity the goal. That's not the goal. Truth is the goal. Unity is the result of truth. That is what he is saying here. When the Jews and the Gentiles connect to the truth, they come together as one but all this depends on each individual in the congregation having a vital connection to Jesus Christ. Ephesians 2:10, "We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works." You are not going to get over these divisions and these conflicts and these factions and these problems until at least a good percentage, if not a good majority of your people are vitally connected to Jesus Christ. That means genuinely wrought upon by the Spirit of God and born again. They have not the capacity to do it. All these disunities and factions and divisions and splits in the professing church today are one of two things: either God is purifying you to become a church or you are not one and he is just revealing that you are not one. But the good thing is, these problems and these challenges of disunity are very often God's process to get you to maturity. And you've got to get to the place where a good strong percentage of the brethren are vitally connected to Jesus Christ. We are his workmanship. Verse 21 of Ephesians 2 it says, "We are being fitted together." Continual action verb, God's Spirit is constantly working to bring the body together in unity. Verse 22, "Being built together," same concept. God is constantly doing that.

You see, the church is a gathering together of those who otherwise would never come together. Did you get that? The church is the gathering together of those who otherwise who would never come together. And those who come together, come in glad sacrificial love and unity and this baffles the world and glorifies God. Can you say that about your congregation? That there is a special bond here of love and unity that the world is amazed by? I just honestly, I want to say this to glory of God, I was meeting with a man in the community recently and he talked for about five minutes to me about watching my church members' love. Just talked to me about it and I was preparing this message. Now don't misunderstand me: we have not arrived; we are still growing and repenting but that is the message we want in the community. Yes, the gospel message of course but have you realized that the purity of the church affects the power of the gospel? You can't just say, "I'm going to preach it straight." No, you've got to shepherd the flock to be straight and keep preaching it straight. It is both and, it is not one or the other. And when this becomes more the supernatural natural thing, it becomes the normal thing in your church family, again, it baffles the world. They are amazed at it and they have to glorify God.

I was thinking about two men in my church. Some of you will pick them out when I say this: one of these men is a blue collar background guy. He has only a high school education. I feel he probably cheated and probably didn't earn that but he wasn't saved at the time. He worked for the union. His spiritual background would be backwoods holiness. He is a classic redneck, just what he is. Then there is another man in our church and he has a Ph.D.. He teaches in the university. He writes for scholarly journals. He has worked for big corporations. He grew up in a more mainline city Southern Baptist Church. His father was a respected politician. I knew him well. His wife's family are very respected business leaders in the community. These two men very, very different, attend church together. They are good friends. They love each other and in addition, the guy with the Ph.D. who writes scholarly journals, regularly sits under the blue collar guy and

listens to his teaching and submits to his leadership. And loves it by the way. Only the Spirit of God.

Let's pray together.