

Together in Christ, Sam Ferguson, September 13, 2020

Key Scripture | Eph. 4:3; Jhn. 17; Eph. 3:10; 1 Cor. 1:10-22; 11:18-22; 12:24-26.

Sermon Outline & Questions

Opening thoughts—

2020 has been strange and trying. (Pandemic, protests, riots, and—soon—an election.)

Sam is asking, ‘How do I lead our church? What does our church need to hear? How do we engage the issues surging around us?’

Our church agrees in its love for Christ. However, there is a diversity of opinions about courses of action. For instance, while we all desire public health, economic stability, and prudent leadership, and while we all despise racism, we often don’t agree on how to respond, diagnose, and seek solutions (i.e., “applied wisdom”).

We should be concerned about the mood of our country. There is a spirit of division at work in America, and it seeps into everything. Will seeds of division be sown within us?

We must be alert to Satan’s devices (division, sin, mistrust). He used these to separate [Eve from God](#); [Cain from Abel](#); [Israelites from Moses](#); [Jesus from God](#).

We should anticipate Satan seeking to sow division among us. Left unchecked, Satan and sin will twist disagreements into disdain and hatred.

The church has a higher calling: to embody Paul’s words in [Eph. 4:3](#) | *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Let us hold together in a compelling way. Sam’s vision for our church body:

May our love for Christ, and Christ’s love for us,
foster a togetherness that bears witness to the Gospel of Hope,
which we hold out to a weary and divided world.

Do you ever consider Satan’s place as a sower of division? Sometimes we accept Satan’s activity in biblical stories, but we have trouble remaining vigilant against him today.

Read Sam’s vision for this series and for our church two or three times. What stands out?

Overview of Sermon Series | Together in Christ amid Divisive Times

We will consider in depth the community that Christ creates by looking at three aspects: the nature, habits, and loves of the church.

- (a) *Nature*. What is unique about how this community comes about, and who does it include? (i.e., Depth and diversity.)
- (b) *Habits*. A community created by Christ and endowed with the Spirit has certain habits of thinking and doing that are unique from the world.

- (c) *Loves*. What is unique about how this community loves in two directions: inwardly to each other and outwardly to the world.

In this series, we'll study the **unique** nature, habits, and loves of a church community.

Sermon Focus | 3 Important Points about Unity from Scripture

1. The importance of considering unity.

(a) *Unity is essential to the vibrancy of the church's witness (Eph. 4:3).*

Paul is *not* speaking about the church body simply “getting along” and being happy. In [Eph. 3:10](#), Paul provides a stunning vision for the church, that through it “the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities...”

The beauty of creation makes tangible the God as the Creator. Where do we look to see God as the Redeemer? What tells the gospel in real time?

The vibrancy of the local church is the tangible expression of the gospel.

[John 17:23](#). The church must be one “so that... the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Key takeaway—Unity is integral, not incidental.

In what ways do you as a church body sometimes treat unity as incidental? Or in what ways do we settle for superficial unity? Why do we do this?

(b) *Satan sews seeds of division inside the church.*

Paul talks about division often. Some issues are about truth and orthodoxy. He also talks about division that is rooted in Christian maturity.

In 1 Cor., Paul uses “schism” three times. What was threatening to divide them?

[1 Cor. 1:10-12](#) | *Division from a party spirit*. “I follow...” The Corinthians were arguing over which leader they liked the best.

[1 Cor. 11:18-22](#) | *Division from class*. In the Roman world, the church drew people from all classes. In Corinth, wealthy people hosted church and feasted while neglecting poorer worshippers.

[1 Cor. 12:24-26](#) | *Division from spiritual gifts*. This kind of division undermines community self-care. Like releasing poison into a hospital.

Key takeaway—We are a church postured in an intense city in an intense time. We must be alert to the wolves outside. Satan *will* attack our church.

What causes division in local churches today, and even TFCA? What would Paul say?

(c) *The divisiveness of the current moment is about heart allegiances.*

[2 Tim. 4:10](#) | “Demas, in love with this present world, deserted me.”

Demas left the church because his heart was pulled by something else. What we love most has the greatest pull on our hearts.

As we feel pulled toward opinions, groups, movements, or parties, we must ask ourselves, ‘What does this reveal about my loves? Does Jesus really possess my heart?’

Of course we can be patriotic, or have fiercely held political views. Ultimately, however, our citizenship must be in heaven.

Key takeaway—If our first love is for something else, our unity is threatened. If we are united in Christ, then our bonds of love will be strong enough to bear great tensions.

What in your life threatens to become your number one heart allegiance? Is there anything that you might need to hold more loosely (political view or figure, social movement, or aspiration, or thing) so that Jesus can truly possess your heart?

2. Clarifying what unity means.

(a) *First qualifier: is unity for everyone?*

An Episcopal priest once said, “I would gladly take heresy over schism.” (i.e., We should be unified over the desire to be unified, not truth.) This is a mushy, shallow unity. What did Jesus mean by unity in Jhn. 17?

Jhn. 17:9 | I pray for *them*. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

Who is “them”?

- A group that has undergone conversion ([v. 6](#)).
- Those who trust God’s word ([vv. 6, 8](#)).
- Those who believe Jesus is God’s unique Son ([v. 8](#)).

We cannot muddle terms like dignity, worth, equality, etc. These terms emanate from a Christian tree. To see the fruit of them, we must understand Jesus is praying that those who know him would have an indestructible unity around these truths.

(b) *Second qualifier: should we expect mushy harmony?*

No. Paul is no naive simpleton. He seems temperamentally predisposed to conflict. (See [Gal. 2:11](#); [Acts 15:36](#).) Christian unity does *not* mean always agreeing.

Jesus’ prayer in Jhn. 17 is exclusive to those who have truly counted the cost to follow him. How might this lead to a deeper, truer kind of unity?

What should sharp disagreements look like between unified Christians? How might it lead to sanctification?

3. The driving energy of Christian togetherness.

Some groups seek unity by mutual toleration (i.e., “Everyone put up with everything”). This is pathetic. You don’t get to know people; no one is sanctified. Other groups seek unity through mutual interests. Neither of these are Christian unity.

Rather, the church must be unified by a love that binds.

[Jhn 17:26](#) | I have made you known to them...in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

The love that always existed between Father and Son is the love Jesus uses to bind the church together. This community is the burning flame displaying God’s love for his people.

Read [Jhn. 17](#) aloud. What stands out?

Final application—

Let us continually take our own temperature this fall. We must ask ourselves, “How is my heart being moved? Is it a spirit of division or the Spirit of Christ?”

This won’t be easy, but it’s an opportunity to display the bonds of love. We can draw many to the gospel. Jesus prayed this in [Jhn. 17](#) and is praying it today.

What might Christ be saying to you? What truth can you seek to apply to your daily life this week?