

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

BIBLICAL UNITY **“Misconceptions of Unity”**

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Kevin Pendergrass.

Welcome to the Gospel of Christ. This is our first lesson on our study of unity. Unity is a very important thing—a subject that many today in the religious world seem to be discussing more than a lot of other biblical subjects. It is very important to answer questions such as, “How do we have biblical unity?,” and “What truly is biblical unity?,” and “What about unity and division?” While these questions and subjects are very important, we are going to be dealing with those later on in our lessons in this series, but in this lesson we are going to be dealing with misconceptions of unity. Misconceptions of unity—what I mean by that is there are people in the religious world today such as preachers or even just people who claim to be Christians who are trying to say how to have unity. They are trading their Bibles or shaking hands and they are saying, “This is the way to have true unity,” and they are giving up some of their core beliefs in order to have what they believe is unity. But what does the Bible say? That is why I believe it is very important in this lesson to clear up some misconceptions so that we do not fall into that category.

The first misconception that we are going to be looking at in this lesson is that of compromise. Compromise. In Ezra 4:1-3 we have Joshua and Zerubbabel rebuilding the temple. In verse 1 I want us to see what the Bible says. It says,

“Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the descendants of the captivity were building the temple of the Lord God of Israel, they came to Zerubbabel and the heads of the fathers' houses, and said to them, ‘Let us build with you, for we seek your God as you do; and we have sacrificed to Him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us here.’ But Zerubbabel and Joshua and the rest of the heads of the fathers' houses of Israel said to them, ‘You may do nothing with us to build a house for our God; but we alone will build to the Lord God of Israel, as King Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.’”

So here we have a situation. Let's set the background. We have Judah rebuilding this temple. And they are out here working, they're rebuilding, and here come their enemies. Maybe they thought the enemies were going to try to stop them in some way. But instead they said, “We want to help you in rebuilding this temple. We're willing to help.” Now, that was an opportunity to compromise for Judah. It would have been very easy for Joshua and Zerubbabel to say, “Well, you know, we are trying to rebuild this temple. And more workers would be a good thing. So come on in and work with us.” An opportunity to compromise. But they were not willing to do that. In fact, look at the way that they answered them. They said, “You may do nothing with us to rebuild this temple.” Now why were they not willing to compromise, because the enemies of Judah, the Samaritans, said that they served God? So if they served God, why were they not willing to let them work? The reason is found in 2 Kings 17:33. The Bible says that they feared the Lord, the Samaritans did, yet they served their own gods “according to the rituals of the nations from among whom they were carried away.” Was it true that they served God? Of course it was true. But what else did they serve? They served other gods. There are many people today who claim to

be serving God, yet they are putting other things in front of God. What does the Bible have to say about that? Jesus, in Matthew 6:24, said that “no one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” God says that if you are going to serve Him, you must serve only Him. That’s why Judah was not willing to compromise for them to work. They were not willing to compromise God’s truth.

Now I want us to look at another Old Testament example—another Old Testament example where we understand that an opportunity was given to compromise, but they did not do that for the sake of unity. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. We may have heard those names before. We are very familiar—some of us may be—with this story. In Daniel 3 beginning in verse 10 I want us to see what the Bible has to say. And we are going to read some of these verses. And it says exactly what is happening in this story. In verse 10 the Bible says, “You, O king, have made a decree that everyone who hears the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the gold image.” So here we have this decree that has been made. Nebuchadnezzar has built this great image, and all in the land must worship it. And if you don’t, listen to what happens in verse 11. “And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.” But “there are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not paid due regard to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the gold image which you have set up.” We so we have Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego who were not willing to compromise. And they understood that the punishment was that they would be thrown in a fiery furnace. They would lose their lives. Now how easy would it have been for them to compromise? Maybe they would have said, “You know, God doesn’t want us to be thrown in this fiery furnace. He knows that if we bow down and worship this image, we are really not worshiping it. We’re just doing it because we don’t want to be thrown into a fiery furnace.” They could have had that mindset—as many people do today. But they didn’t. And they were not willing to compromise. Well, let’s go on and read the rest of the story, beginning in verse 13. Then Nebuchadnezzar heard what was doing on, and “in rage and fury, gave the command to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. So they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke, saying to them, ‘Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the gold image which I have set up?’” So here he is questioning them on the matter—almost giving them a second chance to do it. In fact, he does give them a second chance. Verse 15 says,

“Now if you are ready at the time you hear the sound of the horn, flute, harp, lyre, and psaltery, in symphony with all kinds of music, and you fall down and worship the image which I have made, good! But if you do not worship, you shall be cast immediately into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you from my hands?”

Notice first and foremost they were not willing to compromise. But then Nebuchadnezzar gave them another chance. And sometimes we might stand for the truth the first time, but then when we have another chance to do that same thing, we might not be as brave as we were the first time. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not willing to bend their knee to this false idol. In fact, listen to their response when Nebuchadnezzar asked, “Who is going to deliver you from my hands?” They said in verse 16,

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if not, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.’”

They were not willing—no matter what. They said, “God is going to deliver us, but even if He doesn’t, we’re not going to compromise.

Now let’s make the application to us today. Maybe you are attending a worship service, and there are things being done that you know are sinful, that you know are contrary to the Bible. And what are you going to do about that? Are you going to bend the knee, so to say, and do that anyway? You may be thinking to yourself, “Well, God knows that I have a good heart. He knows that I really don’t want to be doing this. But I don’t want to say anything about it because that means I might disrupt unity among the people.” But you see, in doing that you are not disrupting unity. You are compromising God’s truth. Just like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, we cannot compromise God’s truth.

Now I want us to skip over to the New Testament and look at some New Testament examples where compromise is also condemned. In Revelation 2 we have letters being written to the seven churches of Christ in Asia. And he is writing these different letters to these different congregations. Some he’s commending them, some he’s condemning them for what they’re doing. In the congregation, the church at Pergamos, I want you to know how Jesus first and foremost when He is writing this letter He commends them for what they have been doing. Beginning in verse 13 the Bible says, “I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.” So Jesus begins by commending them and saying, “You have kept the faith. You’ve done some good things. In a lot of ways you are good.” But listen to verse 14. This is the Lord speaking. “But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” Listen to what the Lord is saying. He is saying, “Yes, you are doing some things right. But there are those in the assembly who are sinning. They are holding false beliefs. They are holding false doctrine. And you are not doing anything about it. You’re compromising, and when you compromise, that’s not unity. That may be unity from a worldly standpoint. But from a godly, biblical standpoint, that’s not unity at all.” So many people today will talk about how they’re doing some things right. They are doing a lot of things right. But notice in verse 16 again, they are in sin for compromising because He told them, “Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” We can never compromise any of God’s truth. In Matthew 8:18ff. it says,

“And when Jesus saw great multitudes about Him, He gave a command to depart to the other side. Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.’ Then another of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, let me first go and bury my father.’ But Jesus said to him, ‘Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead.’”

Listen to what Jesus had to say about this. Here they were, wanting to follow Jesus. And Jesus could have compromised and said, “Well, I want you to come now, but I’m going to compromise and then you can come later.” Jesus was never willing to compromise His truths for the sake of unity. And if Jesus wasn’t willing, we can’t be willing either. Not only was Jesus not willing, but He condemned those who did. So let us never compromise in the name of unity because if we do, such is sinful.

Let us go now to the next point—the next misconception of unity. That is the misconception of ignoring problems. Ignoring problems—hoping that they will go away. I remember

when I was a young kid, my mother would always tell me that I needed to clean my room. She would say, "Kevin, your room's a mess. You need to clean it up." I would ignore what she was saying, and I would go and I would grab all my toys and I would push them under my bed or I would put them in my closet and I would just kind of ignore the problem. I wouldn't be cleaning it up at all. The more I did that, the more I ignored it, the more mess that my room really had. When we ignore problems, they don't go away; they only get bigger. Therefore we can't be ignoring problems just for the sake of unity because again that's sinful. And I want us to look at an instance in which Jesus was not willing to ignore a sin problem. In Mark 10 is where we are going to read about this. Beginning in verse 17 the Bible says, "Now as He was going out on the road, one came running, knelt before Him, and asked Him, 'Good Teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?'" Now notice the question. Jesus is walking down the road, and here comes this rich young ruler. And he asks Him, "Jesus, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" He went to the right source, and he asked the right question. We need to be asking that question. What must we do to go to Heaven? And listen to Jesus' reply. So Jesus said to Him,

"Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not bear false witness,' 'Do not defraud,' 'Honor your father and your mother.'"

So Jesus simply told him that he needed to keep the commandments. "You need to keep the commandments that I tell you." And that's what we're told today if we want to go to Heaven. In John 14:15 Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." So we must do that in order to go to Heaven. But listen to the reply of the rich young ruler. He told Him this in verse 20: "And he answered and said to Him, 'Teacher, all these things I have kept from my youth.'" He's talking to Jesus and Jesus told him, "Just name some of the commandments." And the rich young ruler said, "I'm keeping these. I'm doing these things." We have a good, moral man that we are dealing with. This is not a man who's out cheating on his wife. This isn't a man who is disrespectful to his parents. This is not someone who's out killing people. This is what we would see in society as a good, moral man. Now before we see how Jesus answered him, I want us to ask a question to ourselves, "What would we have said to this man?" Would we have said, "Come on anyway. We're going to ignore your problem with money. We're going to ignore your sin problem with putting riches before Christ.?" Is that what we would have said because we would overlook that because he's a good, moral man? What did Jesus do? Let's see what Jesus Christ did when He realized that this man had a sin problem. "Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him." Notice the motivation for Jesus telling him this. He loved him, "and said to him, 'One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.'" Jesus said, "Go and sell everything. Go your way, and whatever you have, sell and give it to the poor. And only when you do that can you come and follow Me." Jesus didn't tell him, "You can come follow Me first." But He told him, "You first must go and sell all you have, and then come and follow Me." In verse 22 the Bible says, "But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." He turned from Christ. He walked away. Why? Because he had great possessions. Christ was not willing to ignore his sin problem. And today we cannot be willing to ignore people's sin problem in the name of unity. In fact, Ephesians 5:11 tells us that we must expose the sin problem. Ephesians 5:11 says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them." The reason we expose is not just to be mean, but just as Christ loved this man we also love people enough—or we should love them enough—to expose their sin so that they can correct it. Romans 6:1-2 says that we cannot continue in sin, hoping that grace will abound, because it won't. And so we must expose people's sin. You see, Christ never ignored sin. While He was on Earth

and He talked to people and He went and He preached, He never ever ignored sin. As much as He talked about unity, He wasn't willing to ignore people's sin. Notice in John 3 beginning in verse 19 it says,

"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

What does this mean? You see, Jesus Christ was very popular when He began His ministry. As He began He was feeding the 5,000. But the more He taught repentance, and the more He exposed sin, people began to hate Jesus more and more. They began to hate Him, and eventually ended up killing Him and putting Him on the cross. But Jesus Christ was the light of the world, and being the light, light does not ignore problems. Light exposes darkness. Light exposes sin. And just as Christ did that, we must also follow Him on this. Matthew 5:16 says, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Just as Christ exposed problems, we must expose problems, too.

Now I want us to go to another instance where ignoring problems is never something that is talked about in the Bible. In Matthew 18 beginning in verse 15 Jesus said, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." Now the Bible doesn't say, "If your brother sins against you, you go and tell the whole world. You go and gossip about it. You go and tell your whole family about it." But it says, "If you've got a problem, you go to that person." When you see somebody's in a sin problem, you are to go to that person and address the issue, not ignore the problem. And it says, "If he hears you, you have gained your brother," which simply means that he has decided to repent and come back and be faithful. But notice in verse 16, "But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.'" The Bible doesn't say, "If he doesn't hear you the first time, you've done your job and then you can ignore it." But it says, "Then you are to take with you two or three witnesses, to go and talk to this brother, to try to bring him back to the truth." Verse 17 says if at that point he refuses to hear them, "tell it to the church. But if he refuses to hear even the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector." If he finally refuses all the help that you've been trying to give him, then you are to bring it forth and make it public before the church. In 1 Corinthians 5 beginning in verse 9 Paul is writing, and he says, "I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people." In verse 9 Paul is saying, "I wrote to you not to keep company with these people." Now Paul goes on to explain he's not talking about just anybody of this world, but those who have been Christians, those who have been baptized into Christ (Gal. 3:27), those who were once God's faithful holy ones, but you've done everything that you can, and they have now erred away. And notice what he says that we are to do to that person. In verse 11 it says, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother," who is involved in these terrible things. We are not to keep spiritual nor social company with these people. Now, we want them to come back and repent. But this is a process of not ignoring a problem, but exposing that problem and correcting the problem. Why is there so much sin today in the church? Because so much sin is ignored. And we all do it in the name of unity. We see how contradictory that is when we compare it to the Word of God. Again, 1 Corinthians 5:13 tells us, "But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person.'" That which shows on the inside. That once faithful Christian, put away from yourselves that evil person. And again, the reason we this is we are not ignoring problems because of love and because of unity, but we

are exposing it because we love the person. We want the person to fix that problem so that they can come back into the fold and that we can have a true, God-pleasing biblical unity.

So we talked about ignoring problems, and how that we can never ignore problems and say we are doing that in the name of unity because as we've sin what the Bible says again, when we do so, such is sinful. So now that brings us to the last point of this lesson. And I believe this last point is one of the bigger points that we see happening today, one of the bigger excuses, the most-used excuses, that people are trying to use in the name of unity. And that is this. It doesn't matter what you're unified on. It doesn't matter what you're unified on. As long as you're unified on something, teaching doesn't matter or doctrine doesn't matter as long as we can just all hold hands and get along, that's all God cares about. But is that true? Let us go to Genesis chapter 11. We have here the story of the Tower of Babel. All these people were gathered here to build a tower all the way up into Heaven. I want us to read verse 1, where it says, “

“Now the whole earth had one language and one speech. And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and they dwelt there. Then they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.’ They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’ But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, ‘Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them.’”

There's no doubt that this was a unified group of people. Notice in verse 1 of Genesis 11 they were unified on their language and on their speech. They had one language. They had one speech. Notice in verse 2 they were unified on their location. They came together. Verse 3, they were unified on their willingness to work. Many people today are very slothful. They are very lazy. They don't want to work. They don't want to do anything. Yet these people, in verse 3 it shows us that they were willing to work. They said, “Come, let us make bricks. Let's bake these bricks. Let's get to work. Let's do this. Let's get the job done.” So they were unified on their willingness to work. Verse 4 we see that they were unified on their purpose and on their goals. They had one purpose and one goal. And what was that purpose and goal? That was to build a tower all the way up into the heavens. And verse 6 is a key verse that I want us to look at and understand. And that is the Lord saw them as unified. The Lord said, “They are as one.” Now from a worldly standpoint, the Lord saw them as one. They were unified as one. But the next question is: Was the Lord pleased with this worldly unity?” Genesis 11 beginning in verse 7 answers that question. The Bible says, “‘Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.’ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city.” It is evident from this verse, and very clear from this verse, that God was not pleased with their unity. But many people would have argued that they were because these were good people who were working. They had one goal. They were unified. And that's all that matters. But God wasn't pleased. Why was He not pleased? Why was God not pleased with this worldly unity? Well, first of all it's because they did not act by faith. In Hebrews 11:6 the Bible tells us, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” We must have true faith—not a fake faith. And what I mean by that is many people in the religious world will do certain acts and they will say they're acting by faith and they are doing it in the name of the Lord. But that is not a true faith because where does true faith come from? Does it come

from our parents? Does it come from our preacher? Does it come from the church we attend? Does it come from our friends? All of these answers are no. The Bible, in Romans 10:17, says, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." So where does a true, God-pleasing faith come from? Only the Word of God. And when we do things in the name of God, if it's not found in the Bible, if it's not authorized, God is not going to be pleased with that.

But another reason He was not pleased was because they were not unified on truth. They were not unified on the right thing. We were saying earlier they were unified, but God cares what we are unified on. John 8:31 says, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed." Notice how Jesus put the "if" there, which means that there's a possibility you might not and you may not if you do not abide in His Word. In 2 John 9 it says that we must abide in His doctrine or His teaching. If we are not unified on the truth, then as much unity as there may be, God is still not going to be pleased with that. Notice what he goes on to say in verse 32. Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." In this verse we know several things. First of all, there is such a thing as truth. Second of all, we can know truth. And third of all, it's only through truth can we be free. It's only on truth and the doctrine of Christ that we can be unified on. John 17:17 says, "Thy word is truth."

Let's never get confused with these misconceptions in simply ignoring problems and believing they'll go away and everything's fine. Let's never get in that concept that that's OK. Let us never fall into the category of ignoring problems in the name of unity. If we do so, such is sinful. And let us never think as long as we are unified it doesn't matter what we're unified on because it does. We hope this lesson has been beneficial, and we want you to join us next time as we begin and continue our study on unity.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR MISCONCEPTIONS OF UNITY

1. In Ezra 4:1-3 what were Joshua and Zerubbabel doing that led others to tempt them to compromise?
2. What response did Joshua and Zerubbabel make to those who tempted them to compromise?
3. What does 2 Kings 17:33 tell us about certain people of that day?
4. How does 2 Kings 17:33 apply to us today?
5. Explain what Jesus meant in Matthew 6:24 when He said, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other."
6. To which three people are we introduced in Daniel 3:12?
7. According to Daniel 3:10-12, what had the three people mentioned in verse 12 done that infuriated King Nebuchadnezzar?
8. In Daniel 3:15, what offer did King Nebuchadnezzar make to the three people to whom he was speaking?
9. According to Daniel 3:16-18, what response did the three people make to the king's offer?
10. What is the moral of the story in Daniel 3 for us today?
11. In Revelation 2:14-15, what did Christ tell the Christians in Pergamos that they were doing wrong?
12. How does the information in Revelation 2:14-15 apply to us today?
13. In Matthew 8:22, what did Jesus mean when He said, "Follow Me, and let the dead bury their own dead."
14. With whom was Jesus having a conversation in Mark 10:17-22?
15. According to Mark 10:18, what did the person to whom Jesus was speaking (in Mark 10:17-22) want to know?
16. According to Mark 10:21, what one thing did the person in Mark 10:17-22 need to do?
17. According to Mark 10:22, did he do it?
18. What is the moral of the story in Mark 10:17-22 for us today?
19. From 2 John 9, what do we know of those who do not abide in Christ's teachings?