



Preserving Unity

SLIDE

- I understand that the word “**Unity**” has a supercharged meaning up here...
- I’m not going to attempt to address Inter-Ecclesial Unity
- I want to talk specifically about the unity of your own Home Ecclesia
- Because Unity begins at Home
- I want to specifically address the Relationships that you maintain in your Home Ecclesia

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- Because **LIFE** is all about learning to **LOVE**, God wants us to really value Relationships
- The verse that has really convicted me over the years is one of the verses we read this morning in our First Class

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- Matthew 25: 40

40) The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the **LEAST** of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

- It’s not about what you do for your Brothers and Sisters...
- It’s about what you do for the ones that you don’t like very much
- Ecclesial Life is not about the Relationships that come easily
- We all have a certain “Cultural Affinity” to some people

- That is good and healthy – We will get encouraged and reinforced by those Relationships

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- But, we learn the **MOST** from the Relationships that **DON'T** come easily
- We learn the most from the prickly, uncomfortable Relationships
- The Relationships with the Brother or Sister that is **NOT** easy to get along with
- The Relationships that are hard to maintain
- It is in these Relationships that we truly learn Love
- But, these Relationships are also quite volatile
- These Relationships fall apart easily
- Part of what God wants us to learn is how to Reconcile Relationships
- He has actually given this to us as a job!

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- 2nd Corinthians 5:18 NIV

18) All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and **gave us the ministry of reconciliation**

- But, sometimes relationships can fall apart
- Whenever there is a rift, or a hurt, or a conflict – You shouldn't just ignore it
- Don't just say to yourself, "Well, that's their problem" and move on
- What do you do then?

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- We have to commit ourselves to Reconciliation with our Brothers and Sisters
- ***Relationships are worth restoring***

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- Romans 15:5 NIV

5) May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus

- It is our job!

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- If you are to be known for your love for one other, then broken fellowship is a disgraceful testimony about you
- We should all learn to be Peacemakers
- Peacemaking is **NOT** Avoiding Conflict
- Pretending a problem doesn't exist or being afraid to talk about it is **NOT** Peacemaking
- Peacemaking is **NOT** Appeasement
- Giving in all the time is **NOT** Peacemaking – You will eventually feel hostile towards others
- Peacemakers are people who are full of Grace
- They draw continually on the goodness of God and then they bring his love, mercy, forgiveness, strength and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life
- Peacemakers dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice and encourage repentance
- Peacemakers focus on Reconciliation
- If Fellowship is Broken – It **NEEDS** to be Restored
- Here are 7 biblical steps to Restoring Fellowship

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1 - Talk to God **BEFORE** talking to the person

- Pray about the conflict instead of gossiping about it...
- You will often find that God resolves the problem immediately
- God may change your heart, or the other person's heart just because you asked..

- If you have to approach the person
- Ask God to give you guidance and courage
- Guidance to say the right thing, and courage to actually say it!

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2 - Always take the INITIATIVE

- It doesn't matter if you were offended or the one doing the offending
- God expects you to make the first move
- Don't wait for them to make the first move
- Even if they SHOULD

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- Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

23) Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you,

24) leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

- ***Schedule a face-to-face meeting as soon as possible***
- No phone calls, no email, no letters, no instant-messaging...
- Choose the right time and place
- Probably **NOT** at Meeting on Sunday
- Coffee before work? Someplace **NEUTRAL** and **FRIENDLY** when you are both **FRESH**

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3 - SYMPATHIZE with their feelings

- Use your ears more than your mouth

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- Philippians 2:4 NIV

4) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

- The Greek word translated here “look out for” means to “focus”

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- ***Focus first on their feelings, and not on the facts***
- ***Begin with sympathy, not solutions***
- Don't try to talk people out of how they feel at first
- Just listen without being defensive
- Let them unload emotionally
- It's hard to just sit there and not say anything in defense, but do it!
- Nod that you understand what they are saying, even when you don't agree with it
- Feelings are not always true or logical
- If you try to address the issues too soon, you will cause immediate resentment

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- ***People don't care what you know, until they know that you care***

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4 - **CONFESS** your part of the conflict

- ***If you really want to restore the relationship, then you should begin by admitting your own mistakes and sins***

- You know you have some...

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- Matthew 7:5 NIV

5) You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

- It's really easy to tell when you have done something wrong in a conflict...
- It's usually predicated by those times you think,

“I don't know what I possibly could have done that would have caused them to act like this!”

- ***If you claim that you're free from sin, you're only fooling yourself...***
- Look closely... You'll find something
- Consider asking a Third Party who you can trust to honestly tell you the truth
- Not gossiping, or fishing for compliments, but to truthfully tell you what they think
- Confession is a powerful tool for reconciliation

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- Often **HOW** you handle a conflict causes a bigger hurt than the original problem
- When you begin by humbly admitting your mistakes, it defuses the other person's anger and disarms their attack
- Don't make excuses or shift the blame
- Accept responsibility for your mistakes and ask for forgiveness

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5 - Attack the problem, **NOT** the person

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- ***Focus on fixing the problem, not on fixing the blame***

SLIDE

- Proverbs 15:1 NIV

1) A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

SLIDE

- In a conflict, **HOW** you say it, is as important as **WHAT** you say

- If you say it offensively, it will be received defensively
- Never say anything that personally attacks the other person
- ***Say, “You have committed a sin...” NOT***
- ***“You are a sinner!”***

SLIDE

6 - COOPERATE as much as possible

- Peace always has a price
- For the sake of fellowship do **WHATEVER** you can to cooperate, adjust to others, and show preference to what they want
- Notice I said “Cooperate” not “Compromise”...
- No one is asking you to deny the fundamentals of your faith
- But, you are being asked to deny yourself that great feeling of proving yourself right
- You don’t have to be right! Just **RECONCILED!**
- Ask yourself, if you really don’t think that it’s not THAT important a matter...
- If you honestly don’t think that it’s a matter of Fellowship...
- Then why are you fighting over it?
- Give them the preference that they want, if it really isn’t that important

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7 - Emphasize **RECONCILIATION not resolution**

- It’s unrealistic to expect everyone to agree about everything

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- ***Reconciliation focuses on the relationship***
- ***Resolution focuses on the problem***
- When you focus your attention on the problem, it grows and grows...

- Focus on reconciliation, and the problem often becomes irrelevant and insignificant
- You **CAN** disagree without being disagreeable
- God expects **UNITY** from us, **NOT UNIFORMITY**
- God chose different members of your Ecclesia for their differences
- You are **NOT** going to agree on everything
- That doesn't mean that you give up looking for a solution to your issues
- Reconciliation means burying the hatchet, not the problem

SLIDE

- ***You don't have to resolve the issue... Just the relationship***
- This isn't easy work
- You have to work **HARD** at **PEACE**
- Why do **YOU** do all this?
- Because, it is your job to protect the unity of the Ecclesia
- Unity in the Ecclesia is so important that the New Testament gives a large portion of it's focus to the concept of Unity

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- ***Unity is the soul of fellowship***
- Destroy Unity and you destroy the Body
- Unity is the essence of how God intends for us to experience life together
- It is your responsibility to Preserve Unity in your Ecclesia
- How do you preserve unity?
- Here are some suggestions:

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- 1** - Focus on what you have in **COMMON** and not on your differences

- The First Principles are Essential...
- But, the First Principles are also only about 14 or 15 different items
- There are thousands of personal differences
- The first five words of the Bible are a good example
- It might be a first principle that God created the Earth and Mankind didn't evolve
- But, **WHEN** was *"In the beginning?"*
- It's a personal difference whether that happened 6,000 or 60,000 years ago
- Focus on the important things, not the things that we have differences on
- Focus on the good things, the things that build up, the things that encourage
- Don't get caught in the cycle of hashing over the tiny, little, unique and rather obscure points that you differ on
- Look at the **BIG PICTURE**
- God chose different personalities, backgrounds, races and preferences
- You should value and enjoy them
- Realize how much better your Ecclesia is because of the dissenting opinions
- You don't all have to think alike to be in Unity

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- 1st Corinthians 1:10 NIV

10) I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

SLIDE

2 - Be **REALISTIC in your expectations**

- This morning we painted a beautiful picture of Real Fellowship
- It's easy to get discouraged when you compare that ideal to the reality of your Ecclesia

- But, you must passionately love your Ecclesia in spite of it's imperfections

SLIDE

- *Longing for the ideal, while criticizing the real... Is evidence of IMMATURITY*
- *Settling for the real, without striving for the ideal... Is evidence of COMPLACENCY*
- *MATURITY is living with the tension between the two*
- Your Brothers and Sisters **WILL** disappoint you and let you down
- But, that is no reason to stop fellowshiping with them
- **NO** Ecclesia is perfect
- That is the point!
- God is trying to teach us that we are all imperfect and in need of his Grace

SLIDE

3 - Choose to **ENCOURAGE** rather than criticize

- It's easier to criticize than it is to get involved
- But don't allow yourself to do that
- It is not **YOUR** Job to Criticize
- Consider what we read in Romans 14

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• Romans 14:1 NIV

- 1) Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters.

SLIDE

• Romans 14:4 NIV

- 4) Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

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- Romans 14:10 NIV

10) You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

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- Romans 14:13 NIV

13) Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

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- Romans 14:19 NIV

19) Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

- Say things to build up, and not tear down
- Find ways to either **HELP OUT** or **KEEP OUT**
- Be **ENCOURAGING!**

SLIDE

4 - Refuse to listen to GOSSIP

- Gossip is simply passing on information when you are neither part of the problem or part of the solution
- We all know it's wrong to Gossip
- I would like to encourage you to not even allow yourself to **LISTEN** to Gossip
- Be the one that takes that awkward stand that says,

"Excuse me, I don't think that we should be talking about that."

- The fastest way to end a conflict is to lovingly confront those who are Gossiping and ask them to stop

SLIDE

- Proverbs 26:20 NIV

20) Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.

SLIDE

5 - Practice MATTHEW 18

- It's easier to complain to a Third Party rather than courageously speak the Truth in Love to the person that you are upset with
- But, it isn't right to complain
- Talk directly to the person and 85% of issues are reconciled
- And only 15% remain to be dealt with
- Take an unbiased Third Party with you to go talk to the person, and 85% of the remaining 15% will be reconciled
- Now, just 15% of the 15% remains...
- Hold an Ecclesial Meeting with that person, and 85% of those issues will be resolved...
- It's God method for conflict resolution
- We all know it
- Force yourself to do it no matter how awkward and inconvenient!

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6 - Support your LEADERS

- ***There are no perfect leaders, but God in His perfection arranged your Ecclesia to have leaders***
- God gives them the responsibility and authority of maintaining Unity in your Ecclesia

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- Hebrews 13:17 NIV

17) Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

- Support them in their decision making
- Encourage them and honor them

• ***They are imperfect leaders working with imperfect members in an imperfect world***

SLIDE

- 1st Thessalonians 5:12-13 NIV

12) Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.

13) Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

- God blesses Ecclesias that are unified
- ***It's in your Ecclesia that you learn to Fellowship...***
- ***To learn to Love each other***

SLIDE

- Because learning how to Love each other is what Life is all about
- We've talked about a lot of things today...
- We've talked about Feeding our Faith

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- Making **PRAYER** ACTIVE and COMMON in Your Ecclesia
- Making **BIBLE READING** APPLICABLE and FREQUENT in Your Ecclesia
- Making **FELLOWSHIP** – REAL FELLOWSHIP in SMALL GROUPS a part of Your Ecclesia
- We talked about how Real Fellowship needs to be encouraged and it is our job to help it to grow

- We talked about how we can **Cultivate** that sense of **Community** in Your Ecclesia
- In order to have **Real Fellowship** we have to commit ourselves to several things:

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- **AUTHENTICITY** is having genuine, heart-to-heart, gut-level sharing instead of being superficial
- **MUTUALITY** is having equal concern for each other's problems, instead of being self-centered
- **SYMPATHY** is entering in and sharing in the pain of others, instead of ignoring them
- **MERCY** is when we rub out the mistakes of others, instead of rubbing them in
- **HONESTY** is when we lovingly speak the truth instead of glossing over problems
- **HUMILITY** is when we admit our own shortcomings instead of pretending we're perfect
- **COURTESY** is when we respect other people's differences, instead of being irritated with them
- **CONFIDENTIALITY** is when we keep things private instead of gossiping about them
- **FREQUENCY** is when we are in the habit of getting together, instead of scheduling other thing
- We learned that sometimes this Fellowship fall apart
- But because Relationships are worth Saving, we talked about how to Restore Fellowship:

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- Talk to God **BEFORE** talking to the person
- Always take the **INITIATIVE**
- **SYMPATHIZE** with their feelings
- **CONFESS** your part of the conflict
- Attack the problem, **NOT** the person
- **COOPERATE** as much as possible

- Emphasize **RECONCILIATION** not resolution
- We will be known by our Love one for another
- Unity in our Ecclesia is vital to our health and our future
- It is **YOUR** responsibility to Preserve Unity in your Ecclesia

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- Focus on what you have in **COMMON** and not on your differences
- Be **REALISTIC** in your expectations
- Choose to **ENCOURAGE** rather than criticize
- Refuse to listen to **GOSSIP**
- Practice **MATTHEW 18**
- Support your **LEADERS**

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- It's a long list, and I thank you for your attention today
- My prayer is that you will find some of these thoughts helpful when you return home to your Ecclesia
- That we will all be able to find a way to be helpful to those who are facing challenges to their Faith
- And God will bless us with Ecclesias that are healthy and vibrant and are places where our Brothers and Sisters, our Young People, and our visitors will feel the love of Christ
- For it is by our **LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER** that we will be known
- Because **LIFE** is all about Learning to **LOVE ONE ANOTHER**