

# LOVE AND UNITY: OUR GREATEST WITNESS

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## Love

What is God like? Who is He?

### EXODUS 34:5-7 (CSB)

<sup>5</sup>The Lord came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed his name, “the Lord.” <sup>6</sup>The Lord passed in front of him and proclaimed: The Lord – the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, <sup>7</sup>maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers’ iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

When you read the passage above, what tends to get most of your attention?

**POINT** – This passage reveals a great deal about the nature and character of God. The iniquities of the parents may affect the family for three or four generations. But the Lord maintains faithful love for a thousand generations. We see a ratio of 4 to 1,000. That’s 1:250.

Verse six describes the Lord’s essence, His character. And it’s all about compassion, grace, love, faithfulness, and forgiveness. This is who God is. He is love.

### I JOHN 4:7-10 (CSB)

<sup>7</sup>Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup>God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his one and only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

### PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Do you think people struggle most to believe that they are sinners in need of salvation, or that God is love and that He loves them unconditionally? Why do you think this?

How do you think our perception of who God is impacts how we choose to respond to and relate with him? How does it impact how we choose to respond to and relate with others?

## Love and Punishment

## Balanced Love

### The Importance of Loving One Another

#### MATTHEW 22:37-40 (CSB)

<sup>37</sup>He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup>This is the greatest and most important command. <sup>39</sup>The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup>All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands.”

#### JOHN 13:34-35 (CSB)

<sup>34</sup>“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

#### COLOSSIANS 3:12-14 (CSB)

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, as God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, <sup>13</sup>bearing with one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a grievance against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you are also to forgive. <sup>14</sup>Above all, put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

- Compassion

- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forgiveness
- Love

### PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Based on what we've covered in the lesson so far, why is love so crucial to our witness?

How does the list above from Colossians 3 align with the Lord's character qualities in Exodus 34? Why is this significant?

## Unity

### JOHN 17:20-23 (CSB)

<sup>20</sup>"I pray not only for these, but also for those who believe in me through their word. <sup>21</sup>May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory you have given me, so that they may be one as we are one. <sup>23</sup>I am in them and you are in me, so that they may be made completely one, that the world may know you have sent me and have loved them as you have loved me.

### READ PSALM 133

**POINT** - Where there is unity, God commands a blessing of life!

## PAUSE FOR THOUGHT

Based on what we've covered in the lesson so far, why is unity so crucial to our witness?

What are some of the biggest barriers to unity in the Church today?

### EPHESIANS 4:1-3 (CSB)

<sup>1</sup>Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, <sup>2</sup>with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup>making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Who are we together?

- Together we are the family gathering of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:29, John 1:12f).
- Together we are Christ's body and He is our Head (Ephesians 1:22, 4:15f).
- Together we are Christ's body that is filled with His glory (Ephesians 1:23).
- Together we are the place where all conflict can find reconciliation (Ephesians 2:16).
- Together we are a people equipped for works of service (Ephesians 4:12).
- Together we are built up and reach unity and maturity in King Jesus (Ephesians 4:12f).
- Together we are built up in love as we help each other (Ephesians 4:16).
- Together we are the community of Holy Spirit-filled worshipers of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:18-20, Colossians 3:16f).
- Together we are provided and cared for by Christ as members of His Body (Ephesians 5:29).

- Together we are Christ's assembly built by Him on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 2:20).
- Together we hold the keys of kingdom authority to be those who proclaim, teach, heal and deliver (Matthew 10:7-8).
- Together we are God's flock gathered together and safe in the Father's hands (John 10:29).
- Together we are the dwelling place of God – Christ in us the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).
- Together we are the people of God: members of God's family; participants in all God's promises to Israel (Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 2:12, 3:6).
- Together we are God's True Temple, His dwelling place where heaven meets earth, the place for true worship (1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16, John 4:23-24).
- Together we are God's holy priesthood offering sacrifices of ourselves, our praise, our good deeds and our goods (1 Peter 2:5, Romans 12:1, Hebrews 13:15f).
- Together we are witnesses with the risen Lord who is the faithful and true witness (Revelation 3:14).
- Together we are the literal body of Christ and share His mandate to preach the good news, to bind up the broken-hearted and to set captives free. (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18).

**POINT** – We cannot truly live from our individual identities in Christ without recognizing first our corporate identity in Christ. The one is made possible by the other. The 'you' in the New Testament epistles is most often speaking to the corporate body – the family of God.

What we do comes from who we are. We are loved, and so we love one another.

- 'A new command I give you: love **one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love **one another**' (John 13:34).
- By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love **one another**' (John 13:35).
- My command is this: love **each other** as I have loved you (John 15:12).
- This is my command: love **each other** (John 15:17).

- Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love **one another**, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law (Romans 13:8).
- May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for **each other** and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1 Thessalonians 3:12).
- Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love **each other** (1 Thessalonians 4:9).
- We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the **love all of you have for one another** is increasing (2 Thessalonians 1:3).
- Keep on loving **one another** as brothers and sisters (Hebrews 13:1).
- Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love **one another** deeply, from the heart (1 Peter 1:22).
- Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love **one another**, be compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3:8).
- Above all, love **each other** deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).
- For this is the message you heard from the beginning: we should love **one another** (1 John 3:11).
- We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love **each other**. Anyone who does not love remains in death (1 John 3:14).
- And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love **one another** as he commanded us (1 John 3:23).
- Dear friends, let us love **one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God (1 John 4:7).
- Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love **one another** (1 John 4:11).
- No **one** has ever seen God; but if we love **one another**, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us (1 John 4:12).
- And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love **one another** (2 John 1:5).

**PAUSE** for Putting into Practice

## Jars Illustration and Activity

1. Do you agree that the church is the place where love and unity should be modeled?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. If the criteria of biblical love (agapé) was used to compare the relationships within your church, how well do you think you are doing?
  - List the strong points in this domain and why these are good examples for others to imitate.
  - Where do you find 'love' missing? Why might this be so?
  - What steps are needed in order to rekindle or ignite love and unity in your church?

3. Consider the church(es) in your town, city, and region. What does your unity in Christ look like? How do you love one another?

- What are the barriers to loving one another?
- What steps are needed in order to rekindle or ignite love and unity in your community fellowship?
- What must you do and in what order, so that love and unity abound?

## Conclusion:

Take time to pray.

- Confess any areas that the Holy Spirit has brought to mind where you have fallen short in love and unity.
- Renounce any patterns of bad behavior that have created barriers to love and unity in your spheres of influence, in your church fellowship, and towards other church communities.