

# OpenTheo

## Strategies for Unity (Part 1)



### Strategies for Unity - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg explores the subject of unity and strategies for overcoming denominational barriers. He argues that unity is a defining attribute in the Bible and is concerned with the growth of the body of Christ. Gregg contends that division among brethren is associated with spiritual immaturity and that the devil seeks to overthrow Christian unity. He encourages Christians to forgive and work together for the greater good of the world.

### Transcript

Tonight, we're beginning an exploration of the subject Strategies for Unity. I didn't know this would be a popular subject, and secondly, I didn't know it would be a controversial subject. When I first thought about giving this talk somewhere in this area, which was several months ago, it was a talk I'd given back in the 70s or the 80s, sometime before.

I may have given it maybe two times over my lifetime. From the time I was very young in the ministry, in my teens, very early on, I felt that God put a real, I guess, a vision in me for the body of Christ, and for his goals, his desires for what the body of Christ is supposed to be, and his great grief over the divisions in the body of Christ. There's very much in Scripture on this, Old and New Testament, but especially in the New, of course.

So I haven't taught this for a while, and the reason is I kind of thought people weren't really interested in this subject. I am, but I kind of thought, well, people aren't really that interested. One of our guests here, Joe, or no, it wasn't Joe, yeah, it was Joe, was telling me just before the meeting tonight that he's tried to talk about areas of theology where he differs from other Christians on, just in a casual, personal way, and they don't want to hear anything about it.

They just want to separate from people who don't see things their way. It scares them, it threatens them to talk about something they don't agree with. He was saying that's so frustrating.

Well, it certainly is frustrating. You wonder, why is it that people don't want to be in unity with other Christians? Well, they do. They want to be in unity with Christians who agree

with them about everything, but when it comes to Christians who don't, what's the challenge here? What's the danger that they're fearing? What's it going to cost to be loving towards somebody who doesn't have the same opinion you have? I just have never quite grasped that, but I did have the opinion that not many people are interested in the subject of unity.

And I can see we have a pretty good crowd here, so I guess there are some people interested. When I posted on my Facebook page just an announcement that we're going to do this. How many of you have seen that announcement on the Facebook page? Well, it became like a powder keg.

I was amazed. I didn't even know this was controversial. I just said I'm going to be talking about unity, strategies of unity, you know, and explain a little bit what I'm going to be talking about.

And man, there was just all kinds of hostility from some of the posters. I mean, there was a lot of support too. There was a lot of people participating, but I was just so surprised to find the reactions against unity.

But I think the reason is, well, first of all, because of what I'm going to be talking about tonight, and that is that this isn't just a pep talk about, hey, let's be one, let's sing kumbaya, let's put our arms around each other, let's break down the denominational barriers and just all be one big, you know, world council of churches kind of thing. That's not what I'm interested in. I don't think God is either.

We're not talking about institutionalization. We're not talking about churches making one big institutional monstrosity. The world had that for a thousand years in the Middle Ages, and that wasn't a good thing.

There was only one institutional church in Europe for a thousand years. It was about the worst thousand years Europe has ever seen. They were not interested.

I should say I'm not interested in talking about joining churches into big churches. Not that that is never an okay thing to do. I'm not saying that little churches can't join other little churches for fellowship or whatever.

But you see, I was in a church for a little while in Idaho years ago that had people of almost every theological persuasion there. There were Calvinists there. There were Armenians there.

There were dispensationalists. There were Reformed. There were Mennonites.

There were Charismatics. There were non-Charismatics. All in one church.

And they all just loved each other. And frankly, anyone, because we didn't have a pastor

or any official leadership in that church, anyone who wanted to could preach. And so men would get up week after week, and some would preach whatever their views were, and someone else would preach whatever their view was and so forth.

And sometimes they weren't the same. And you say, oh, wouldn't that be so confusing? Why? Why? Don't you know what you believe? Don't you know why? Does it scare you to hear someone say something you don't agree with? No one was afraid. No one was threatened.

You know, one guy got up there, and he's the only, there's only one Pentecostal guy in that church. And he wasn't real literate or anything like that, but he was passionate. And he preached one time.

Only once. And he got up and preached how everybody needs to speak in tongues to be saved. Well, no one agreed with him, but they said, oh, that's money.

God bless him. You know, I mean, just no one felt like they had to agree with whoever was talking. Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there's liberty.

He can believe that if he wants to, and I feel sorry for him. But the thing is, I'm not threatened that he believes that. I'm not threatened that somebody believes in Calvinism and I don't, but if somebody believes in dispensationalism and I don't, so what? Is that what following Jesus is all about? Following Jesus is about following Jesus.

And everyone who's following Jesus is following the same Jesus, unless they're following a different Jesus, and that may be the case with some of the cults. But all the churches I know that are Christian seem to have the same idea about who Jesus is, for the most part, and they have different ideas about other things. Well, all these divisions, people get scared of, but there's no reason to.

You see, I think the reason many people get scared, and I was telling Joe this, as he was talking about this fear that people seem to show of even talking about things different. Most people don't even know why they believe what they believe. They don't read or study their Bibles, most people.

They want the preacher to think for them. You tell me what it says, and I'll just, I can learn that. I'll sit under the preacher week after week.

I'll learn whatever he says. I'll get that down. I'll master it.

I'll be able to repeat it. But then someone comes along, and he says something different than what my preacher says. Well, I'm getting all my information from my preacher.

I can't read for myself. At least I don't want to. I have a television, after all, and a computer.

What do I need to read for? And so let somebody else read the Bible and tell me what it means. And then someone comes up and says, well, it might not mean that. You may be wrong about that.

Suddenly, it's very threatening. Like, you mean my pastor could be wrong? Then I just go back to square one and find another pastor who's got everything right and learn from him now? No, you don't have to do that. You don't have to be right about everything to be okay.

You need to be a learner, though. You need to love your brothers and sisters. You need to be humble and teachable.

You have to trust God that he is leading you through his spirit and leading others to all truth. And my Catholic friends have said to me many times, well, you Protestants, you know, you don't have a central authority like we do. You know, the Catholics have the Pope and the College of Bishops and so forth to tell them what to think.

And Protestants don't have anything like that. Well, some do. Some denominations actually do have their own kind of Popish people in them.

But for the most part, the Protestant movement doesn't have any central authority. And so they say, look, you're splitting off all different ways. But the Holy Spirit's supposed to lead us into all truth.

If the Holy Spirit's leading us into all truth, how come we're all in different, have different viewpoints? And there are reasons for that. One is, of course, that when the Holy Spirit first gets his hands on us, we're not all in the same place. Some of us come from different cultures, different religious prejudices, different temperaments and so forth.

And the Holy Spirit wants us all to get to one place eventually in our knowledge of him. He wants us all to know him. Know him as he really is.

But he's got to start with us where he finds us. And we don't just learn by him putting a cable in our head and downloading all the information. He's got to persuade us.

He's got to jerk us loose from our prejudices. And this is not the easiest thing in the world. Think of how long it took Peter even to be open to the idea of people being saved without being circumcised.

In the book of Acts. I mean, it's just like how stiff-necked we are, how slow we are to learn, how insecure, so that we're afraid of possible change. And so the Holy Spirit's leading us, but we're not all following at the same speed or from the same originating point.

And so as the world finds us, we get a snapshot right now of the church at any given

time. And people are all over the place in their beliefs. But if you could see a movie from, let's say, covering a hundred years or something like that, those who really love the Lord are really being drawn closer to the Lord.

I have found this. The more I find people who aren't locked into any particular denomination, they might attend a denominational church, but they're not locked in. They're followers of Jesus.

They just love Jesus. The more I find people like that, no matter where they're from, the more they tend to agree on more and more things as time goes by, even though they're not necessarily influencing each other. And I meet people all over the place.

I'm always surprised how many people agree with the way I'm seeing it when I haven't met them before, and they haven't met me. And I think the Holy Spirit's leading us, but slow. And we're not going to get all the way there in our lifetime, probably.

So you better be patient. You better be patient with yourself and with others. In the meantime, make sure you're moving.

That is, that you're moving toward what God wants. And one of the things He wants is unity in the body of Christ. When I talk about strategies for unity, there's two parts to that name, strategies and unity.

And I want to talk first about why unity, and then I want to talk about why strategy. Strategies is a word related to warfare. Well, that's why I'm using that word, because disunity is a product of losing in the spiritual battle against an adversary who is very much opposed to unity among Christians.

And we need to embrace that warfare and have proper biblical teaching, biblical strategies about how to defeat that warfare. But in the meantime, we need to first of all decide what the objective is and why. Why unity? There's a great number of reasons the Bible gives for us to be concerned about unity.

And as you can see in the notes, I've itemized some of them, and there's scriptures for all of them. So look with me at Ephesians chapter 4. And I'd like to read actually more than the verses that are listed. I want to read the first six verses of Ephesians 4, 1 through 6. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. Now, some of those points he mentioned, you say, I have a question about that. What do you mean one baptism? Or what do you mean, you know, one hope? How

do we know we all have the same hope? Don't get caught up on that right now.

Just look at the overall thing that Paul is saying here. He's saying we need to be humble and lowly in mind and seeking to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Why? Because it only makes sense when you have the same Father, the same Gospel, the same Lord, the same Spirit, the same faith.

In other words, the reality is we are one in all the things that define us. We're the same family. We're following the same king.

We're in the same kingdom. We're filled with the same Spirit. We're all baptized into Jesus.

We're all, you know, following the same guy. The point here is that Paul is saying you are one, whether you notice it or not. All the things that define who you are as a Christian define every other person who is a Christian too.

They might be very different from you in many respects, culturally or theologically in many respects. But if they have the same Lord, the same Father, the same Holy Spirit, the same body they're in, well listen, unity is real in God's sight. This is the unity in the Spirit.

He says you need to keep the unity of the Spirit. Now, you can only keep something you already have. He assumes that we already have that.

Why do we have that? Why do all Christians have unity in the Spirit? Because they have the same Spirit, that's why. And the same Father, and the same Lord, and the same God, and all that. So it's reality.

To be disunified is to be out of touch with reality. At least not to be seeing reality as God sees it. Because when he looks down, he sees one body, one family.

Every Christian on the planet is one of his kids. And that's reality. And to live in disunity is to be living in denial of this reality.

Now notice later in the same chapter, Ephesians 4.13, he says, until we all come into unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a mature man. The Church isn't there yet, and Paul's not pretending. We still have to get there.

We have to keep the unity that exists now until we come into this other kind of unity. Unity of the faith, of the knowledge of the Son of God. We don't all know the same things about the Son of God.

We're still learning. We don't all believe all the same things. We don't have absolute unity in faith and knowledge.

But we have unity in the Spirit. And we have to keep the unity of the Spirit until we come into the knowledge, the unity of the faith and of the knowledge. And notice what that results in.

It results in spiritual maturity. Until we all come into unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a... New King James says, perfect man, so does the King James. But actually the word can be translated mature, and that's certainly what he has in mind, until we grow up, as we can see from the following verses.

Until we come to a mature man, and to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The church is to come into a mature man that's just like Jesus. Now he's not talking about you becoming just like Jesus and me becoming just like Jesus, though that is discussed elsewhere in Scripture.

Here he's talking about the church corporately becoming a man. Till we, plural, become a singular man. Now if you have some modern translation that is more periphrastic, I might say, until we all come to mature manhood, or something like that.

That's the Bible to get rid of. I think the NIV says that. They're trying to obscure the fact.

Till we all come into mature manhood. Well, that could be every one individually becoming mature. And surely we shall, but Paul didn't say that.

He said, till we all, the church, become a mature man. Why did he call the church a man? Well, he did that earlier in chapter 2 of Ephesians. In Ephesians 2.14, he says of Christ, For He Himself is our peace, who has made both, that is the Jew and the Gentile, one, and has broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is the hostility between the Jew and the Gentile.

That is the law of the commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself of the two, that is of the Jew and the Gentile, one new man. That's the body of Christ. God took the Jew, He took the Gentile, those who are in Christ of those two races, He broke down the middle wall of partition between, and made in Himself of those two, one new entity, one new man.

Why a man? Because it's the body of a man, Jesus. Jesus is the head and we're members of the body. This corporate entity that God made, with Jesus as the head and us as the flesh and the bones and the hands and the feet, this is a man in God's eyes.

One being. And Paul then turns and says in chapter four, we need to become a mature man. Now what does maturity look like to the body of Christ? Well, look at the, look at the, well, before we get to that question, we're going to answer that in our next point, but let me turn you to 1 Corinthians 12, just because it's, it is next in the notes.

I like to jump around sometimes, but I better make sure I don't skip over important

things. 1 Corinthians 12, the point I'm talking about right now is the reason to seek unity is because if you're not aware of the unity, you are in denial about spiritual reality. And denial is like deception.

And the devil, by the way, would love for you to stay in that condition. I wouldn't. And God, I don't think, would want you to either.

But in chapter 12, verse 12 of 1 Corinthians, Paul says, for as the body, and in that he means the generic human body. Here, Paul, for the first time in his writings, is introducing the concept of the body of Christ. It's become so common to us that when we hear him say the body, we think, oh, he means the church.

Well, he is going to talk about the church. He's going to talk about the church as being like the body, your body, any body, any human body. The body, in verse 12, is the generic human body, any given one.

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. Now, that's interesting, because I would have thought he'd say, so also is the church, wouldn't you? As a human body is one body, it has many parts, and the many parts are many, but they make one body, so also is the church. Well, in fact, he does mean the church, but he doesn't say that.

He says, so also is Christ. Now, why would he say that? Because the church is the body of Christ, and the church, a body and the head cannot be disassociated from each other and still survive. And the identity of the body is the same as the identity of the head.

That's why we are called Christians. That's why we can use the name of Jesus as if it's ours, because it is. We can act in the name of Jesus, where his authorized representative is his hands and his feet, because we are one organic body of which he is the head, and we're all the rest.

And, in fact, I didn't want to turn there, because of the time consumed, but in Ephesians chapter 1, at the very end of Ephesians 1, the very last verse, it says, the church is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. The church is Christ's body. The church is the fullness of him.

In Paul's thinking, Christ has a corporate existence now. When Jesus was on the earth alone, he was the body of Christ. There were no other members of that body.

He was the whole thing, head and body. Hands, feet, all parts were him. Jesus alone.

When he was in the upper room with the disciples, he said, you know, it's good for you that I go away, because if I don't go away, the Holy Spirit's not going to come down. And it's good for that to happen. Why? What changed then? I just assumed Jesus stayed here, and we could be the Jesus fan club.



But he didn't want a fan club, he wanted a body. He wanted to become a head, and have an organic oneness with his followers, so that they would have his spirit. Not the same spirit that was in the head, filling every member as one body.

And that's what makes your physical body your body, instead of someone else's. The spirit of life that's in your head is also in your body. The spirit of life that's in my head isn't in your body.

You've got a different spirit in your body than I have. I mean, the Holy Spirit's the same, but I'm talking human spirit. The human spirit in each of us makes our head and body all one.

They all share the same life. Also, the fact that all the members of my body obey this head instead of your head, makes it me. This body is me because it obeys my head.

When I came into the room, you didn't say, here comes Steve and his head. You know? And you didn't say, here comes Steve and his body. It's just Steve.

Steve, head and body. One person. Paul said the church is his body, which is the fullness of him.

The extension of him. He's the head at the right hand of God. The body extends down onto the earth, and his feet are still on earth as they always were, but in different form.

Corporate. The body is a man in God's sight. God has taken the two, Jew and Gentile, broken down the middle wall of partition, made in himself, that is in Christ, one new man.

And Paul says, now we need for that new man to become a mature man. He said in Ephesians. But now we're in 1 Corinthians 12, 12.

He says, as a body has many parts, but it's one body, so also is Christ. He is a many-membered body now. And he says in the next verse, for by one spirit, again that's where the unity of the spirit comes from, everyone having the same spirit, for by one spirit we were all baptized into one body.

Whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have all been made to drink into one spirit. For in fact, the body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, because I'm not a hand, I'm not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, because I'm not an eye, I'm not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each of them, in the body, just as he pleased.

And if they were all one member, where would the body be? But now indeed, there are

many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you. Nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

No, much rather those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, of these we bestow greater honor. In other words, they're still the same body.

Some members of the body are more presentable than others. Some are, you know, you put up front to represent, and the others you kind of, you protect them from exposure and so forth. Not everyone's the same in the body of Christ, but that's just the point.

What is Paul getting at here? I mean, he's not just, he's saying, listen, if you think you're not part of the same body because you're different than another part is, you're out of touch with reality. You're in denial. The eye can't say, I'm not part of the body because I'm not a hand.

And he can't say to the head, I have no need of you. You're wrong. The body does need both parts, needs all the parts.

And every part is part of the same body. Paul's arguing for the unity of the church as a single body. And this is what he's trying to get at because we've all been baptized by one spirit into the same body.

We're all one body. We have the same spirit. That's the spirit of Christ.

Therefore, we have unity or oneness in the spirit. If we're one, then the quality of being one is called oneness or unity. And we're one body because we have the same spirit.

So we're one in the spirit. You know that phrase, of course, in the song, too. And we also have what Paul calls, therefore, unity of the spirit.

Now, notice here, though. In spite of the fact that we're one, we're not the same. And that's one thing Paul underscores.

The members of the body are extremely different from each other. Think about it. Your eye and your hand, they have hardly anything in common except that they have the same spirit, the same life of the same person in them.

And they work together to serve the purpose of the head. That's what makes them one body. Otherwise, they've got nothing in common.

Well, they've got DNA in common, but that's invisible. The thing is, the gross anatomy of every part of your body is really different than that of any other part. And they're not even interchangeable.

My brain and my heart, both incredibly useful to me. But, in fact, I would say they're of

equal value to each other. But they're not interchangeable.

You know, if a doctor says, you need a heart transplant, but we don't have anyone who's got a heart. Well, here's someone donating a brain. Can we put that in there? No, thanks.

No, they're not interchangeable parts. They're equal in value, but they're not interchangeable. They're different.

And what Paul is arguing is that unity does not mean uniformity. And this is so important because we think, I can be one with people who are like me, and the more like me they are, the more I can get along with them. That means that I'm counting unity to be uniformity.

As long as we're uniform, we're the same. The more the same we are, the more I can like you. Why? Why do you have to be like me for me to like you? I can be one with you and have no uniformity.

We can be very different. Diversity is not disunity. It may lead to it if you're carnal and immature, but it shouldn't.

I remember when in the early days of the charismatic movement, actually in the early 70s, I came out of the Baptist denomination and came to Calvary Chapel, and I got baptized in the Spirit there and so forth. So I would go back to my Baptist church and try to convince people that there was something there for them there that they should look into. And I remember more than once I talked to, I'm saying Baptist because that's what I was, but it could be almost any kind of cessationist.

These pastors would say, well, we don't let people speak in tongues in this church. I said, well, why not? The Bible says do not forbid to speak in tongues. Well, he said, but we have found that tongues divides the church.

It does? Tongues divides the church? Well, yeah, because some people have it and some people don't, and the people who don't feel inferior, and the people who do feel like they're all that, and so it divides the church. I said, you know what? I go to churches where some people speak in tongues and some people don't, and they're not divided. I don't think tongues divides the church.

I think immaturity divides the church. If I speak in tongues and you don't, and you feel inferior, well, you've got a problem that's not related to what I'm doing, and if I feel I'm all that, because I do and you don't, well, then I've got a spiritual problem, don't I? It's a spiritual problem. It's an immaturity problem, spiritual immaturity problem.

Churches divide for one reason, and that's because the people are immature. Otherwise, they'll get along, and like I said, the church in Idaho I went to, all those things were there, and no one was threatened. We got along.

We loved each other. It was a great church. We even built a house for, all the brothers in the whole church showed up one weekend and built a house for one of the members, sort of like an Amish barn raising.

It was really cool. I don't even know how to do construction, but I even helped, because there's unity in that church. It was great.

We all loved each other, and yet there were so many differences, but see, diversity isn't disunity. Immaturity is disunity. If you are disunited with other brothers, you're in denial about the reality that God has created in the body of Christ, that you're all one and interdependent, too.

This is something God did to kind of force us into unity, and we're not cooperating, and so the body's not working. God said, okay, I don't want anyone to be exactly like Jesus. He was the whole body of Christ.

He didn't need anyone else. Now he's the head, and I'm just one member. You're another member.

We need each other. The hand can't say, I don't need you, foot, really. Then how are you going to get over across the room to do what you're going to do, hand? You need the foot.

Yet the foot and the hand have very little in common. They both have five digits on them, but that's about it. Now, apes, similarity of hands and feet, about the same, but God made us very different.

Our parts are very different from each other, and why? So we couldn't say, I don't need you. The truth is, we do. We're interdependent.

If I say, I don't need you, or my church doesn't need anyone else, except people who think like us, well, then what if there's something that your church isn't capable of doing, but another church, some other people in another church have something that you don't have? Well, we're good enough. You know, we're good enough the way we are. As long as you think we're good enough the way we are, obviously, you're gonna be self-contained and self-important and self-confident and self, self, self, self, self.

You see, God made the church in such a way that we do need people who don't agree with us, who don't have the same gifts we have, who don't look like us, whose cultural habits rub us the wrong way. This is how we grow up. As long as we can isolate ourselves to be with only the people who agree with us, we don't need any diversity.

We can have unity because we're uniform. And this is, of course, the way the church has developed over the past 2,000 years, if you know church history. The early church, they didn't all agree on everything.

We know that because Paul would write to them and say, you know, some of you think, you know, you can only eat vegetables and some of you think you can eat all things and some of you think you should keep one day special and some of you think you can keep every day alike. These are pretty big differences between different Christians. What did Paul say? Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

What? You mean I can be wrong? Or I can be right and he can be wrong? And that's okay? Well, for now, for now, God's working on us. We'll all be changing. For now, let's just live with the fact that we don't all see everything alike.

And that's how Paul understood it. That some Christians see it the one way, some another. The Holy Spirit will eventually do so unto all truth.

But in the meantime, what are you going to do? You'd give liberty and you love and just be brothers because we're a family. Now, what happened in church history was eventually, like, about 325 A.D., some of the differences became more problematic because the Roman Empire became Christian. Constantine the Emperor became a Christian in like 312.

And so Christianity became institutionalized as part of the empire. But once you institutionalize it, you've got to standardize it. And for 300 years before that, Christians didn't have to all agree with each other.

They were just brothers and were just supposed to love each other, like Jesus said. By this, all men will know that you're my disciples if you love one another. Not if you've signed this creed or if you can state your faith in certain terms the same way someone else does.

If you love one another, then they'll know you're my disciples. That's what it was until that time in the 4th century. Once the church became institutionalized, it got standardized.

Now, one of the big issues at first that they wanted to settle is whether Jesus is God or something else than God. And so the Nicene Council met because some Christians had views that are a little bit like what the Jehovah's Witnesses hold now, that Jesus was a creation of God, but still the greatest of all the creations. And then others were held more like what we hold, that Jesus was God.

But both views were allowed for hundreds of years in the church, and people still loved each other and fellowshiped. But once they had to standardize the church, they got the bishops together, they got Arius in there who believed like the JW's do, they got Athanasius in there who believes like we do, and they had a whole bunch of other bishops there and they fought it out for a while and eventually they came out with the decision that Jesus is God. Now, of course, they were right, at least by my way of

thinking they were right.

I believe Jesus is God and I'm glad they figured it out right. I'm glad they didn't go the other way. But what's really sad is that the day before they made that decision, all the brothers were brothers.

The day after they made the decision, half those brothers were heretics. They hadn't changed. They were the same brothers, but now they were, the council didn't make them heretics, it defined them as heretics.

They were Christians before that, now they're not. Why? Because they don't agree about this. Now you're going to say, Steve, do you think it's okay for someone not to agree about that? I'm not making the decisions about what's okay.

Let God decide that. But I will say this, I don't think all the early Christians, I don't think the disciples when they walked with Jesus fully understood that he was God. I think they had to learn that.

I think they left their nets not knowing that. They knew he was the Messiah, but that's not the same thing as knowing he was the second person of the Trinity. The Jews had never taught any Trinity doctrine.

And so the disciples didn't know that stuff, but they loved each other and they followed Jesus and they eventually learned it. But the point here is once you decide, okay, you have to believe it just this way or else now you're a heretic. Suddenly the liberty in the body of Christ gets more narrowed and that wasn't the end of it.

Once they start on that trail there was no end to it. They had council after council. They had 21 ecumenical councils and each one they narrowed the fellowship a little more.

Does Jesus have two natures? A divine and a human? Or does he have one nature that's part divine and part human? Oh, well, make a decision about that. We'll kick out the guys on the wrong side of that one too. And they did.

Now, which is the right answer by the way on that one? Well, how could we know? The Bible doesn't even address it. But on a subject the Bible doesn't even address they were willing to kick out Nestorius and other important Christian leaders because they didn't answer the question the right way. A question that has absolutely no practical value whatsoever and isn't even addressed in the Bible.

But they kept going. They kept talking about how about monophysitism and monophilatism and these are the words I'm not even pronouncing correctly. Does God have did Jesus have two wills or one will? Did Jesus have two natures or one nature? Well, I mean they all agreed that he was God but it wasn't enough.

They had to decide how many was his nature one or two? Did he have one will or two? Well, I mean it might be interesting stuff for Christians to talk about. But to divide over? And they did. And you see what happened is after the beginning of the 4th century what had been a family of people who had one thing in common a lot of things in common one spirit, one Lord, one baptism, one God and Father of all they were a big family all one suddenly they said no, I'm not one with those people who don't agree on this.

No, I'm not one with those who don't agree on this. Suddenly it became the fellowship of the agreeing ones not the fellowship of the loving ones. And so Christianity was redefined as a religion based on proper theology on more and more and more detailed things.

Finally, by the time the Roman Catholic Church rose up they were willing to burn heretics and torture them in the Inquisition because they didn't answer the questions the right way. And a lot of people they burned and killed and tortured were godly people who loved Jesus and probably were more like us than like their Inquisitors, really. But it became mandatory to be of the same opinion about everything.

Well, then come the Reformers Luther doesn't have the same opinion as the Catholics so they kick him out too. They would have killed him but he hid. Actually, he was kidnapped by his friends and hidden in a castle for a year for the German king so the Pope couldn't find him and kill him if they wanted to.

So he survived. But he started killing people who disagreed with him. Then came along Calvin.

Calvin was a good Reformer and most Reformed people like what he had to say but he killed people who disagreed with him too. He burned Michael Servetus at the stake and Zwingli, a Reformer, killed 4,000 Anabaptists because they wanted to get baptized after they got saved instead of going with their infant baptism. These things, one thing after another, no one got over the opinion that you divide over opinion.

That was institutionalized when those ecumenical councils began. The whole mentality changed. It used to be, you're my brother if you love Jesus and God is your father.

Then it became, you're my brother if you agree on this, this, this, and this, this, and this, otherwise you're not my brother. And we haven't gotten over it yet. That's why there's 44,000 denominations right now because each denomination starts the same way.

You're in a church. You're pretty much in agreement as far as you know with the people there. Suddenly you hear someone say something you don't agree with.

You take them aside and say, I think I heard you misspeak. They say, no, I didn't misspeak. I said, what do I believe? Well, you can't believe that because the Bible says this.

Oh no, I think the Bible says this. Now wait a minute. I can read my Bible.

You tell me I don't read my Bible right? You tell me I don't read my Bible right? I'm going to take the people who agree with me and we're going to go fellowship over here and you take the people who agree with you, you go fellowship over there and we won't have any more company with you. We got a new denomination now and it keeps going on and on and on and on until there's 44,000 because the opinion is, if you share my opinion, I can fellowship with you. If you don't, go somewhere else.

And what ends up, of course, is everyone ends up in fellowship with people who agree with them. That means no one's going to ever learn another thing again. You see, in the early church, people who disagreed still had to be in the same church.

I mean, they had to iron sharpen iron. They had to listen to each other and critique each other and have their views critiqued and they had to, you know, you wonder why the Holy Spirit's not leading us all into the same truth at one time. He would if we'd stay together, if we were in the same fellowship.

I'm not saying the same institution. You can go to any institution you want to and it doesn't change anything. You could be the Baptist, the Presbyterian, the Methodist, the Church of Christ, the Church of God, even the Roman Catholic, the Episcopal.

You can go wherever you want. If you're a follower of Jesus Christ with your whole heart and sincerely, you're part of the fellowship I'm in. I go church in one particular place, but I'm in the church globally that belongs to Jesus Christ and to me, I don't make any difference.

Because I don't think God does. Now, sure, some say, well, you think the Catholics are okay? They have all those idols and stuff in their church. They worship Mary and the saints.

Well, frankly, I don't think that is good. I think that's wrong. But you know what? I can look at the church I go to and find a few things wrong.

And I can look at a church I don't go to that's not Catholic and find even more things I think are wrong. I can find a lot of things wrong. You can find things wrong with me, believe it or not, if you look long enough.

I know it takes a long time, but the point is everyone's got some things wrong with them. The question is, do they belong to Jesus? Do you have the spirit of Christ? How do you know? Well, Jesus said, you'll know if you love one another. The Bible says in 1 John 4, 7, it says, Beloved, let's love one another for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

What a statement that is. Everybody who loves is born of God and knows God and he



that does not love does not know God for God is love. Well, those kind of statements don't, they don't sit well with me.

I've got at least too many different opinions I think people have to conform to to be really born of God. But maybe John knew better than I do. Could have.

In any case, he rattles my cage because I know some people who have really bad doctrines in my opinion, but they have a lot of love. They love God and they love people. I mean, I once spoke favorably of Mother Teresa on the radio once and someone called it was angry that I spoke well of Mother Teresa.

Don't you know she prayed to Mary? Don't you know she was a Roman Catholic? Well, of course, doesn't everybody know she was a Roman Catholic? I never thought she was a Methodist. So what? Well, you know, she had all these wrong ideas. True.

She did. If I had, if I'd been in relationship with her over a long period of time, I would have talked to her about some of those because I'd like to, I would like to have seen her give up some of those ideas. But you know what? I think she loved God and loved people more than most of the Protestants I've met.

And if we go by what Jesus said is the indicator of a disciple, you know, I think she ticks all the boxes. And, you know, I think Catholic Church is wrong about lots of stuff. I think all churches are wrong about a lot of stuff.

And some wronger than others. But we're not talking about let's forget about all the differences and just sing kumbaya. We're talking about recognizing who our brothers are.

We live in a world where our brothers are not always that easy to find. And some of those are going underground. There are lots of them going down into home churches and things like that where they don't want to be seen because they're afraid of what's happening in the world.

It's too bad. But a lot of them have done that because they've been kicked out of church after church after church because they're just doing too much thinking for themselves. But thinking for yourself isn't the worst thing in the world, is it? I mean, if you're divisive over it, that's bad.

But you can have a different opinion than me and I don't see why that would be a problem between us. I don't know why it would be a problem if I think differently than someone else. But the point here is the disunity is because of diversity responded wrongly to.

There is such a thing as appreciating the diversity. Now, unfortunately, all these good words like diversity have been spoiled by our political speak because diversity now

means embracing homosexual marriage or something like that. That's diversity.

If you don't embrace that, you have to go through diversity training if you're in certain jobs. What a shame that such good words have been so ruined. But diversity just means being different.

And Paul's talking about that. There's eyes, there are hands, there are feet, there are ears, and they all do something different. And they're all very different, but they are one.

That's what unity is. So to be in disharmony, to be divided and disunified, is to not see what God's seen and to be in denial about what is, in fact, true in the situation. Now, look at 1 Corinthians 3 because I'm going to tell you that division, being disunified, is juvenile.

Remember Paul said that we're going to come to a mature man when we come to the point of unity in the faith and knowledge, sorry, to a mature man. Well, disunity is just the opposite of being mature. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, 1, And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people, but as to carnal, that means fleshly people, as to babes, juveniles, babes in Christ, infantile.

Why? He said, I fed you with milk and not with solid food, for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you're still not able, for you are still carnal, for where there are envy and strife and divisions among you are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? For when one says, I am of Paul and another, I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? Now, I don't know anyone these days who says, I am of Apollos. And I'm not sure I know very many people who say, I'm of Paul. Perhaps the hyper-dispensationalist people would feel comfortable saying, I'm of Paul.

They don't believe anything except what Paul wrote is for Christians. But we do have, I am of Calvin, I am of Wesley, I am of Chuck Smith, I am of Luther, I am of Peter's successor in Rome, I am of these different people. Or even favorite authors.

Maybe not even the founders of the movement, just favorite authors. I am of A.W. Tozer, I am of John MacArthur, I am of someone else who rings my chimes, Max Mercado. I am of Steve Gray.

That's not healthy. You're not of anybody except Jesus, if you're a Christian. And to say, I am of Paul, or I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas, that's just carnality.

Paul says, that's just being babies. You're just babies. I can't even give you solid food.

You just need milk all over again. And you get it, spill it all over each other. You're just messy.

It's a messy church. Now, by the way, we think, well, I'm of Paul, that's not really, what's so alarming about that? Because we were born in it. You know, we're not, we weren't the

frog in the kettle put into cold water and boiled.

We were put into boiling water, we were born in the boiling water. And we don't know if there's anything wrong with it. The divisions in the church are the very thing that was beginning in Corinth.

When people say, I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas. That's the beginning of denominations. And Paul nipped it in the bud and said, no, you're not.

You're carnal when you talk like that. Stop it. And so they didn't say it anymore for a little while.

Until Paul died, then they did it again. As we know from the letter that Clement of Rome wrote to the same church after Paul was gone, they were dividing again. Still juvenile.

But so are we now. 2,000 years later, we're about as juvenile by that measure as can be. Maybe not as much as can be, but much too much.

So why unity? Because disunity is living in denial of spiritual reality, of the oneness of the body of Christ. Because disunity is juvenile, spiritual juvenility. And because we should be investing in what God invests in.

You know, I hear these advertisements on the radio. You know what Warren Buffet's investing in now? He's investing in silver. He knows something you don't know.

Get silver. Why? Because he's a really successful investor. He's really wealthy, so he must know something.

Do what he's doing. But look what God's investing in. He's really smart.

He really knows what's coming down. He really knows what's valuable. He's really rich.

So what does God invest in? He invests in the body of Christ. He invests in the unity of the body of Christ. Look at what Paul says in Ephesians 2, which we were looking at Ephesians 2 a moment ago, but I just want to point out one thing that I didn't mention.

In Ephesians 2, verse 14 through 16, we read this, For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, hath broken down the middle wall of division between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments, contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile them both to God, in one body through the cross, therefore putting to death the enmity. So in order to make two into one body, he made reconciliation through the cross. Now the cross, isn't that kind of one of the evidences of God's evaluation? What he's willing to pay for something? Could God have paid more than his son dying on the cross? That tells you something about what God values.

Jesus died on the cross to reconcile us to God and to each other in one body. Now if God's investing in that, I want to invest in that. I think there's a future for that.

I think there's value in that. And look at chapter 4 of Ephesians again. We were there a moment ago.

I just want to read a larger portion of it and bring up a similar point. Ephesians 4, 7, but to each one of us grace is given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Now the rest of this part I want to read is about Christ's gift, what he gave.

That's what he paid, what he gives, what he invests. Therefore he says, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Now gifts cost you something.

It's an investment someone makes. God invested gifts in the church. Now verse 11, and he gave some to the apostles and some prophets.

By the way, if you think those aren't expensive to God, you haven't read their lives. Being a prophet is costly. Precious in the sight of the Lord, that means expensive in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints.

His apostles and prophets mostly died. That was a very precious loss. God paid for something.

But he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers. For what? For the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry. Okay, that's good.

For the edifying or the building up of the body of Christ. Until when? Until we reach the goal that he invested in. What is what? Until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a perfect man or a mature man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro by and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive, but speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him.

That's what we're growing up into, is we're growing up into him. A little boy grows up into a man. A puppy grows into a dog.

The church grows up into Jesus. Until we all, by speaking the truth in love, we'll all grow up into him. Who is the head? Christ.

From whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies according to the effect of working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. Notice that there's a work that the body's

supposed to be doing, and every part of the body is supposed to be making a contribution to the whole work of the one body. Now, notice he says that the body grows as a result of that, of what every joint supplies.

Why does he say every joint? Why didn't he say every member? What is a joint in a body, anyway? It's where two members relate. It's a relationship between two members, isn't it? If you get stiff joints, those members don't relate well together. Some of you know that.

But a joint is not a member. A joint is a connection between two members. It's a relationship.

The relationships in the body of Christ, the members relating and working together, is that which is supposed to cause growth in the body of Christ. But if we say, I have no need of you because I'm a hand and you're an eye, well then we're not going to work together. Worse yet, if I'm an upper arm and you're a lower arm, then we're not going to work together.

There's no joint supplying any benefits there. See, this is what, Paul loves this picture of the body and he uses it a lot. But the point here is he's saying that God has invested heavily in this.

He, through the cross, he paid the ultimate price. Then he's given these gifts to man, apostles, prophets, evangelists, these gifts he's given. For what? For us to grow up into Christ, into one mature man, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

Okay, another reason why unity is because God hates division among brethren. It's an abomination to God. According to Proverbs chapter 6, verses 16 through 19.

Proverbs 6, 16 through 19, Solomon says, These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to him. What? A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood. Those are pretty bad things, especially the hands that shed innocent blood.

That's really bad. A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift in running to evil. Well, it just gets worse and worse.

A false witness who spreads lies and one who sows discord among brethren. God hates people who sow discord among brethren, like he hates feet that run to shed innocent blood and all these other horrible things? I guess so. God hates division.

And why shouldn't he? I hate it when my kids don't get along. Nobody loves my kids like I do. And I love them all.

I have five kids and people just say, Which kid's your favorite kid? Well, it depends on

which one I'm talking to. It's always that one. Honestly, every kid I think about in my childhood, they're my favorite.

They really are. It's not just a game I'm playing. Every single kid is my favorite.

And, you know, I love my kids so much, it really grieves me if they don't love each other. Because if you don't love who I love, it bums me out. When you meet someone you like, don't you want all your friends to meet them and don't you want them to like them? You know? You want the people that you love to love the other people that you love.

Of course. And if they're your kids, you want them to all love each other. Nothing is more of a grief to parents than when the kids are alienated and won't speak to each other.

Especially grown-up kids often come to that point. I know of people like, families like that. Thankfully, I've been spared that.

But I, you know, I have two siblings. I've never had an argument with them that I remember. I've never had any problems.

Of course, my parents have never had an argument between themselves that I can remember. It's an unusual family, I know. But I've met people who have got five kids in the family and none of them will speak to any of the others.

What in the world? What would their parents feel if they're still living? You know, to see that. It'd be horrible. God hates it when someone takes his family and starts driving wedges so they don't love each other anymore.

It's an abomination to him, the one who sows discord among brethren. But again, there's more. Another reason to be concerned about unity is because, and this is the reason the devil is concerned about it too, is that unity is a harbinger of revival.

On the day of Pentecost, in Acts chapter 2, before the Spirit fell, we read this. Now, when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all, all Christians, all the living Christians in that town were with one accord in one place. They were all there unified in one accord.

And what happened? The Spirit fell upon them and revival began. There have been revivals since that time too. Revivals either are usually sparked by unity in the church or cause it.

You can't really ever have a real revival without unity being connected to it because God's not going to send his Spirit on people who don't love each other and stay unloving to each other. It's just not going to happen. He may part his Spirit, but if you don't love each other, it's going to quench the Spirit.

There's going to be no revival there. It's when Christians love each other that God is

pleased and he sends revival. Look at Psalm.

This is a very famous Psalm in this regard. The first verses are well known. The later verses get a little confusing, but I like the whole Psalm.

I think we need to look at the whole thing. It's only a few verses in its entirety. Psalm 133.

It's like only three verses. Psalm 133 says, Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Now, who's it pleasant to? Maybe David finds it pleasant? Could be.

His brothers didn't like him much, though. They drove him out. David's brothers, and he didn't get along real well, but maybe he saw people who did.

Maybe he saw families that weren't so dysfunctional and said, wow, is that ever cool? How neat that is to be with these people. Or maybe he's saying God finds it good and pleasant. Certainly God would for his children to be loving each other, dwelling together in unity.

But then he says, It is like the precious oil upon the head running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron running down on the edge of his garments. What in the world? How is that like that? How is brethren living together in unity like the oil poured over Aaron's head that would drip down through his beard and all over his clothes? But who's Aaron, by the way? He's the high priest. Do we know anything about spiritual significance? High priesthood or anything like that? I believe Aaron is a type of Christ.

Christ the high priest, right? Now, Jesus isn't a priest after the order of Aaron. He's after the order of Melchizedek. But Aaron is the first high priest who went into the Holy of Holies and so forth.

I believe he's a type of Christ in the Old Testament. Because Christ is the great high priest. Now, that being so, what's this? This oil stuff? Well, when Aaron was installed in office, in those days it was customary to pour oil over someone's head.

That's called anointing. The word anointing we sometimes use in other ways now in religious talk. But actually the word anointing is to pour oil over something.

Or at least liquid. To pour liquid over. And in the case of installing a king or a priest into office, it was oil which represented the Holy Spirit being poured over the head.

And Aaron, it wasn't just a little bit. You know how the Bible says in James, if anyone's sick, let him call to the elders and let them anoint him with oil. And so the elders have this little vial of oil and they put a little on their finger and they kind of make a little cross on your forehead.

That's anointing. Anointing is when they pour it all over your head. It runs all over you.

Down through your beard. You ladies, that's really hard to get out. The beard.

But once it goes down through the beard, it's all over the body, all over the clothes. And that's what it says. It's like the oil that was poured down over the head of Aaron running down on his head, his beard, running down on the edge of his garments.

He got soaked, saturated. Now, Jesus is the head. And the spirit that's poured over Jesus is the spirit that's supposed to be poured over his body.

But the body has to be standing under Jesus. That's what the body is for. You know what the body is for? To hold up the head.

And if the body's standing under the head, then the oil that's poured over the head gets all the body, too. But if the body's all scattered around in different places and not all of them are unified, not all under the head, well, then some get it and some don't. But the point here is that the spirit of God that's poured out on Christ is poured out on his body, too.

But you've got to be standing under the head, just like Aaron's body was under his head and the oil on his head also anointed his body. We need the anointing of the Holy Spirit on the body of Christ. Christ has it.

The head is anointed. But when brethren dwell together in unity, which is not always the case, well, then that same oil that's on Christ, that same anointing comes on his body. And it goes on to say, it's like the dew of Hermon, which is Mount Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

Where? Where brethren dwell together in unity, that's where God commands a blessing. He pours out his Spirit upon the body of Christ. He commands blessing.

He blesses the body of Christ when the body's in unity. Now, bear with me for just this next portion and we're going to be, I'm not going to take all our notes. I just want to take the other, next question, why strategies? I said, why unity? Because God's all about it.

But again, remember, I'm not talking, and I don't think the Bible talks at all, about institutional churches joining to be big, monstrous institutional churches. That's not the body of Christ. Institutional churches came up later.

When Jesus was here, he didn't start an institutional church. He just started a family of people who had the same father and were supposed to get along and love each other like brothers. It got institutionalized later on, centuries later, and now that's all we know.

But I'm talking about real spiritual connections, real spiritual relationships. They cross



the lines of institutions. You don't have to put all the institutions together in one big building.

It's just that you as an individual who might be attending one of them has to not be prejudiced or separated too much from people who attend another one if they happen to love the Lord. Because they know something you don't and you know something they don't. And if we don't separate so much, if we interbreed, if we cross-pollinate, then what we know can infect them and what they know can infect us, and we can grow up into a mature man instead of all becoming little backwater eddies of just our same stuff going around in circles over and over again and we never get out into the mainstream.

You know? We're just provincial. But if we get unprovincialized, say, hey, those people are my brothers and sisters too. I'm talking about real relations, I'm not talking about where you go to church.

See, this is where people get confused. The people who got upset at my website or at my Facebook page, they thought I was talking about putting the churches together in one big church. They didn't realize I don't even believe in that.

I don't... Going to church, that's the smallest part of being a Christian. How many hours a week are you in church? Two, maybe? Three? If that? What about those other hours? You're a Christian then too. What are you supposed to be doing then? Being the body of Christ with the other members of the body of Christ.

I mean, it's great if the same people that you be the body of Christ with during the week also happen to worship with you on Sunday. Great! All the better. But if they worship somewhere else on Sunday, that's no problem.

If they believe something different about some things than you do, that's okay too, isn't it? If they're Christians, can't you love them? Can't you work with them? Can't you... You know, I mean, Evan here has a prison ministry. I think most of the people are from our church, probably. I don't know all who are involved, but I'll bet people from other churches could be involved in that too.

And there's ways that the body of Christ works outside of the church meeting that don't have to be so provincial, don't have to be so ghettoized. We can actually... And when we're with someone who we know is from a different denomination, we shouldn't have this secret superiority. We feel, oh well, you know, I love them because they were supposed to.

I'll act like it anyway, but I really know I'm better than they are. I really know they're really stupider than I am because they don't know as much as I know. They don't see as clearly as I do.

They're not as spiritual. They're not as mature. Well, if they're divisive, then they're not

mature.

But if they're simply ignorant, what do you have to realize about someone who sees things different than you? They probably aren't wrong on purpose. You ever think about that? They might not even be wrong. But even if they're wrong, or if you're the one who's wrong, you're not wrong on purpose.

You're trying to be right. You don't want to be wrong. It's not like you're saying, the Bible teaches it, but I really don't want to believe that.

No, you believe what you think the Bible teaches. So do they. So the difference between you and them is you're more confident in your own ability to understand, and they're more confident in their ability.

How about if we just kind of let down the pride and say, I could be wrong as easily as they could, but I'm not going to give up my views just to please them. I'm going to follow my conscience. I'm going to study the Word of God.

I'm going to ask God to lead me into all truth. I'm going to believe what I believe is there. It may not be what anyone else I know believes, but I'm going to believe it anyway.

But they don't have to agree with me until they see it that way, too, if they ever do. We can wait, and we should. We should be able to wait for each other.

But why do we need strategies for you? Why don't we just get over these divisions and just be one? Well, because we're trying to be one, but not in a vacuum. We're in a war zone, and the war zone has an enemy who's very experienced and very threatened and very invisible. Now, that seems to put us at a disadvantage, doesn't it? Fighting an invisible opponent.

If someone said, you know, I need a volunteer to come up here in the boxing ring and fight this opponent here. You know, I said, well, I was a pretty good boxer in college. I think I'll go try that out.

You get up there and say, oh, one thing, you've got to be blindfolded. You can't see him. You still have to fight him.

He can see you. He doesn't have to be blindfolded. He can see you every moment of the fight, but you can't see him any of it.

Well, you might feel like, well, that seems a little unfair. I'm at a serious handicap here. And that's kind of where we're at in one sense when we're fighting against the devil.

We can't see him. He can see us. That doesn't seem fair.

But you know what? God has pulled his covers. The Bible says we are not ignorant of his

devices. God is invisible, too, and so are the angels, and they're on our side.

We've got more on our side than against us. But there are things that we have to discern spiritually because they are spiritual things. Oh, my.

Hi, Liz. Can I call you later? I'm in the middle of a lecture. OK, I'll call you later.

My daughter. I couldn't say no. My favorite daughter.

All right. That was all staged, of course. All right.

So we've got this enemy, and he's very much threatened. The fact that there's an enemy that wants to do damage in the body of Christ to the company of Christians is we're told that. Peter is told that.

In Luke chapter 22 and verse 31, Jesus said, Simon, Simon, indeed Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you that your faith should not fail. Now, what you may not realize is in the Greek, there's singular and plural, you.

It doesn't come out in our modern English. But when he says, Simon, Satan has asked for you, that's you, Peter, that he might sift you, plural, you, the church, as wheat. Satan wants to sift the church.

What's sifting wheat mean? It means you put all the raw harvest into a sieve and you shake it up in a way that the little holes, all the chaff falls out and all that's left is the wheat. You get rid of the chaff and keep the wheat. Satan wants to do that with the church.

He wants to put them all in a place where he can shake them up, divide them up into categories and so forth. And Jesus said, Peter, I prayed for you because you're in danger. You're in danger because Satan has asked for you.

Now, interestingly, Satan has to ask. Satan can't just attack you. Remember, he wanted to attack Job, but he said, God, I can't attack Job.

You put a hedge around him. He had to go and ask permission. Satan can't do anything to you unless God lets him.

But God wants to test us, too. God wants us to learn our lessons. He wants to test us to see we've learned our lessons.

And so he does allow Satan. What Jesus is implying is Satan has asked to sift you and I'm going to let him. But I'm going to pray for you that you won't fall through the cracks in that sifting.

Now, we find in the Old Testament from time to time the devil attacks people with God's

permission. Job is one example. That hedge that God had around Job would have protected Job from all attacks and did until God said, okay, you can do this much but no more.

And the devil hit him. Then again, later. Now, that's not the only case.

You read in the Old Testament of an evil spirit from the Lord came against Saul. Remember that? Or even earlier than that in the book of Judges. I think it's chapter 9. It says the Lord put an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

What happened then? People who were friends became divided. An evil spirit was sent. Well, it says the Lord sent them.

True. They had to get permission from God. But it's the work of an evil spirit.

If God allows it, that evil spirit will come and then we have to deal with it. We will not face any warfare that God doesn't allow us to. Remember when the Israelites came out of Egypt? It says God didn't take them the way of the Philistines because He didn't want them to be discouraged by seeing battle.

So He took them the longer way around. Later they had to see battle when they came into Canaan. Even before that, they had to fight.

But in the beginning, He didn't want them to have to face battle. They were immature. Their faith was weak.

So He just spared them. There's times when God wants you to see battle and times He doesn't. When He allows it, an evil spirit can come and then you're under test.

Then the devil tries to do his worst, but you don't have to let it. It's war. You don't have to lose.

But when an evil spirit is not resisted, he comes against the men of Shechem and Abimelech and they elected him as king and now they're wanting to kill him. Saul. When did the evil spirit come on Saul? In 1 Samuel 18.

It says when David killed Goliath. And all the people were rejoicing and saying, David has... Saul has slain his thousands. David has slain his tens of thousands.

And it says Saul, when he heard that, he said, they're attributing to David tens of thousands. To me, they're only attributing thousands. Meaning body count of the enemy that he killed.

And Saul said, what more can he have but the kingdom? And then it says, and Saul eyed David with suspicion from that day forward and the next morning an evil spirit from the Lord came upon him. And he was in his house and David was playing his little harp and

Saul threw a spear at him. And that was kind of the beginning of a breakdown in what had been a good relationship.

An evil spirit. Yeah, evil spirits like to divide Christians. Look, why? What does it matter to them? Well, the devil has a lot to lose if the church wakes up to the fact that God wants them to be one and starts actually doing it.

Look at John chapter 17, the prayer of Jesus. You know what Jesus prayed for there. But I want to put it in its context here.

John 17, 11, Jesus is praying for us. And he says, now I'm no longer in the world but these are in the world. And I come to you, Holy Father, keep through your name those whom you have given me that they may be one as we are.

Wait, keep from whom? Keep them, well look at verse 15. I do not pray that you should take them out of the world but you should keep them from the evil one. What, keep them from the evil one, why? So that they can be one as we are.

The evil one's going to work against that. Why would the evil one care about that? Well, look at verse 21. That they may all be one as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us that the world may believe that you sent me.

And the glory which you gave me, I've given them that they may be just one just as we are one in I in them and you in me that they may be made perfect in one and that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them as you have loved me. Now, twice he says, I pray that they'll be one so that the world may believe and so that the world may know, what? That you sent me, Jesus said. That the world would know that God sent Jesus.

Does the world know that yet, 2,000 years later? Does the world know that God sent Jesus? They don't seem to know. Are we one? We don't act like it. Could there be a connection? Why would the devil not want us to be unified? Do you think the devil wants the world to know that Jesus was sent from the Father? The devil resists that.

He stands to lose so much. A united church is really trouble to the devil. What happened in Jerusalem after Pentecost? The people were one.

They were one soul and one heart. They were so much one that they just didn't even say that anything they owned was their own. They had all things common.

As anyone was poor, someone who owned property sold his property and gave it to someone who needed it. That's unity of an extraordinary visible level. And it says, and the Lord added to the church daily, such as we're being saved.

When people see that kind of supernatural difference, it's impressive. They know there's

something there. Maybe God did send Jesus.

The devil doesn't want people to know that, and so the devil's going to work against that all he can, of course. Look at Matthew 18. Most of these verses are familiar to you.

I'm just bringing them together in a context, trying to make a single point that may not have been, you may not have tied these with this point before. In Matthew 18, verses 19 and 20, Jesus said, again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven for where two or three are gathered together in my name, I am there in the midst of them. Now there's some power there in the united fellowship of Christians, agreeing on anything.

Not on everything, on anything. You see, maybe Jesus said, where two of you will agree on anything, anything can happen. Because one of the hardest things in the whole world to imagine is two of you agreeing on anything.

Once you've got that, all bets are off, anything can happen. You can have whatever you ask for. Because it's so rare.

But the point here is that when Christians are in agreement, he said two or three, Jesus is there in a different way than when they're not there in agreement. Somehow the presence of Christ, perhaps it's just a larger portion of the body of Christ is a more full manifestation of his presence. I don't know.

But certainly it means something. It means something I think the devil wouldn't like very much. For Jesus to be manifest in the church, for the church to be united and be getting the things they asked for, the enemy doesn't want that.

He's got a lot to lose there. There's a lot of risk there. And Ecclesiastes 4, you've probably heard this mostly read at weddings, which is not bad.

Weddings, marriages need unity too. But Ecclesiastes 4 verses 19, excuse me, 9 through 12. Did I write that wrong? Yeah, it's obviously not 19 through 12.

Typo, it's 9 through 12. Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion, but woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up.

Again, if two lie down together, they'll keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken. Unity with other people who are Christians gives you strength and invulnerability that you wouldn't have just as an isolated monad.

If you're walking alone, you're a sitting duck for the devil's devices. If one walks alone, one can overpower him, but two can withstand him. The devil doesn't want any two of us

agreeing enough to pray and to stand in warfare against him because he wants to win.

He doesn't want us to win. So, the devil seeks to overthrow Christian unity. Look what James tells us here.

James 3, verses 14 and 15. He says, but if you have bitter envying and self-seeking in your hearts, does the King James say strife there, I think, maybe? If you have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, that's disunity there. Do not boast and lie against the truth.

This wisdom does not descend from above. This is not godly wisdom. It is earthly.

It is sensual. It's demonic. The King James says devilish, but it's the word demon in the Greek.

The point here is it's demonic. Feel free. You're at liberty.

God bless you guys. It's good to see you. I'll see you tomorrow.

Okay. God bless you guys. See, if you've got envy and strife in your hearts, that's demonic wisdom, not godly wisdom.

Now, it's interesting that he says that. He said this wisdom comes from not God, but it comes from the world, the flesh, and the devil. It's earthly.

It's sensual. It's devilish. All the enemies of your soul are behind that kind of wisdom.

If you're thinking that it makes sense to be divided from other brothers, that's the devil's influence, and the world, and the flesh, too. It's carnality. It's immaturity, as Paul said.

Now, the devil who is against us has strategies, and that's why we need strategies. The reason I say we need strategies is because you don't fight a war without strategy. And the devil does not lack strategy.

He has strategies. The Bible makes reference to them. In Ephesians 6, verse 11, it says, Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

The word wiles in the Greek means schemes. His strategies, his schemes, his plots. You need to be able to stand against his plotting against you.

Like I said, he sees you even when you don't see him. Because you don't see him, you might forget he's there. He doesn't forget you're there.

He's plotting against you. He's plotting against us. He's plotting against the body of Christ.

He is determined to prevent unity in the body of Christ. Look at 2 Corinthians 2. We're almost done, as you can tell. 2 Corinthians 2, verse 10 and 11.

Paul said, Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ. Lest Satan should take advantage of us, for we're not ignorant of his devices.

Again, his methods, his strategies. We're not ignorant of his strategies. He's got strategies.

If you are ignorant of them, no wonder you succumb. You need to know what his are and what yours are supposed to be to counter them. Notice what this is in relation to.

Division of the church. Someone in the church needs to be forgiven. Don't neglect to forgive him.

Forgive him. Lest the devil get an advantage over us. An advantage in what way? Obviously, unforgiveness divides people.

That's the wedge the devil is trying to put in. We're not ignorant of what he's up to. Or are we? If we are, we're in trouble.

I think often the church is, in fact, ignorant. In fact, on the same Facebook thread, my announcement just that I was going to speak on this subject, there was even another entirely different set of objections. It's not the devil, it's us.

It's our flesh. It's our sin. We shouldn't be blaming the devil for things.

I said, well, I'm not blaming the devil for what we do. I'm blaming him for what he does. We can blame ourselves for what we do, but we have to blame him for what he does.

Isn't that what Jesus did in the Garden of Eden? Satan, you did this. This is what you're going to get. Woman, you did this.

This is what you're going to get. Man, you did this. Yeah, let's blame the parties that are guilty.

But you see, a lot of people say, oh, we don't want to think about the devil. That's kind of goofy. That's kind of superstitious.

I mean, I know some demon chasers out there. I see a demon under every bush. Let's just not even talk about the devil.

Let's just talk about our responsibilities. Well, good. We're talking about our strategies.

That's our responsibilities. But the strategies are necessary because there is a devil, and he has plots and strategies of his own. Peter says, be vigilant.



Be sober because your adversary, the devil, like a roaring lion walks about seeking whom he may devour. How can we be vigilant and sober looking out for the devil if we're saying, I don't want to think about the devil. Let's not think about that.

Let's just think about us and our responsibility. Well, that can be overdone. We do have responsibility.

We should never shirk that. But there is a devil, and he's doing something too. And to admit it is not to say we're not responsible.

Eve said, the serpent beguiled me and I ate. God didn't say, oh, then you're off the hook. Devil, it's all your fault.

No, he said, devil, you nasty devil. You're going to have this. But Eve, you did the wrong thing.

I told you not to do that. So you're going to have this pain and childbearing and all the rest. In other words, you can blame the devil for what the devil does and still blame the sinner for what the sinner did because no sinner has to obey the devil.

But very few sinners are going to resist the devil if they don't know he's there. The Bible says, resist the devil and he'll flee from you in James 4, 7. And yet, if we're not allowed to talk about the devil, who's going to know to resist him? We're just going to be confused. How come I'm trying to live a Christian life and I keep stumbling? How come I'm trying to make peace with these people and they don't want to have peace? I don't get it.

It's irrational. Well, it's spiritual. It's a spiritual war.

And in a spiritual war, you have to have strategy and you have to carry out your strategy. And God has given us strategies. That's what the Bible is.

It's our field manual for the battle. I'm going to close with these verses here in Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, verse 26 and 27. Paul said, be angry and do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. The devil. Yeah, it's possible to give place to the devil.

Now, you don't want to do that. Like Paul said, lest the devil should get advantage over us. He can.

He's not really stronger than us with God. With us, he that is in you is greater than he that is in the world. But if you're not even aware of he that's in the world, he can get the advantage by stealth.

He's invisible. He can be working in your life and you don't even notice. I remember I was influenced by early teaching in my Christian life that we're not supposed to think about

the devil.

Don't blame the devil for stuff and so forth. And I was trying to lead a Christian community actually up in Oregon back in 1978. And the people were all good Christian people and they all loved each other.

But there just came this really strange vibe in the place where people were just starting to have friction with each other over nothing. I mean, there's really nothing. They were just starting to get nasty with each other.

I was watching and thinking, what in the world? And so I said, let's get together and have a meeting here and see what's going on. Who's offending who? What's going on here? Why are you people acting like this? And these were not immature Christian people. They were pretty strong Christians all.

They joined this Christian outreach house that I was leading and they were Bible trained and so forth. And well-intentioned, but they were just not getting along. So we'd sit in a circle to have this meeting to try to iron things out.

And one would say, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Another would say, so you think blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And he said, no, I didn't say that.

I heard you say it just then. And I was there saying, no, they didn't say that. I heard it with my own ears.

And then it would keep happening. I mean, someone would say something and it wasn't what somebody else was hearing. And what they were hearing was something really different that could not easily be gotten out of what was said.

And it was very offensive to them. And it made them angry. I thought, what in the world? These are rational people.

How can this be happening? And one of the girls there, she said, I wonder if this is demonic. She said, I wonder if the devil's like twisting things. Like someone says something innocent and by the time it gets to that person's ears, it's all twisted around.

The devil fits in a different way. I said, nah, you don't want to blame the devil. It's just carnality here.

That was me. I was trained to not blame the devil for anything. I was just considered to be wrong to blame the devil.

And it's interesting. I didn't blame the devil. I didn't see it as the devil.

And that house broke up within a week and everyone went different ways and didn't last anymore. And then I found out the day after it broke up, one of the ladies from town

who'd been coming to our Bible series there had been trying to cast like spells on the house. We found actually a journal that she actually left behind at one of the meetings.

And it was really spooky reading it because she was having this dialogue with a spirit. And it was talking to her and so forth. It was like automatic writing.

I'd never seen anything quite like it. It gave me the creeps when I read it. But it was like demonic.

It's like this woman was trying to really destroy our house and did. But it shouldn't have been able to happen because if I'd known it was the devil, if I wasn't in denial about it. But see, I don't want to blame the devil.

We're mature people. We can take responsibility for this. But one of the girls there said, I think maybe the devil.

I'm not going to consider that. If I'd listened to her, maybe we could have done something more effective against the enemy and ministry survived. I don't know.

But the devil does like to put wedges between people. And sometimes it's mysterious. I've had four or five different times over the past 50 years in my 45 years of ministry that people who were like close friends in ministry, like for no reason, just turned on me.

We never had an argument, never had a disagreement. And suddenly they were against me and they were stirring up other people against me. I tried to talk to them and they just wouldn't hear.

I tried to say, well, let's talk this out. They said, don't contact me. Don't email me.

Don't call me. I think, what in the world's going on here? And I, you know, looking back in some of those cases, it came out and the men involved who had done that actually recognized that they were just like in a spiritual fog, something got confused, something weird happened. They misinterpreted something.

I think the devil's about all that kind of stuff. I think he wants to split up Christian marriages. He wants to split up Christian friendships.

He wants to split up ministries, churches, whatever. And he's really good at it. And unless we get kind of equally good or better at seeing what he's up to and implementing strategies that God himself has given us, we're not going to win any more than we've been winning.

But we got to, or else we'll never grow up into him in all things. We'll still just keep dividing more and more. There'll be 50,000 denominations by this time next week.

And so there's a warfare. The enemy has strategies. We have strategies given to us.

As you can see, I'm not going to look at them tonight. This will be in later lectures in the series. But if you look down, you can see very much, a lot of scripture here about how to overcome that demonic power that wants to drive us further apart.

And it happens in the strangest ways. And I've seen a lot of it because I've been in ministry a long time. And you may have too.

Those of you who are old and been a Christian for a long time. But I want to talk about that in the remaining lectures of this series.