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Strategies for Unity (Part 3)



Strategies for Unity - Steve Gregg

In "Strategies for Unity (Part 3)," Steve Gregg discusses the importance of unity in the Spirit despite differences in beliefs or practices. He stresses that the Holy Spirit is responsible for bringing about true unity and that individuals should focus on changing themselves rather than trying to change the whole church. Gregg also emphasizes the value of avoiding offense and contention in order to live in harmony with one another as members of one family in Christ. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to prioritize their relationship with God above all else.

Transcript

The notes that you have on your seat, if there weren't notes on your seat, there's some extra ones around, you can grab some, are the notes for this entire series. We are tonight in the third lecture in a four-part series. And the notes for the whole series are here.

That's what I used to teach from. And we covered in the first lecture, side one of the notes. And side two is taking us three lectures.

This is called Strategies for Unity. I don't want to go over all the material that we've covered in previous talks, but let me just say that unity among Christians is one of God's more front burner concerns in scripture. That Christians should be united is something Jesus prayed for.

He prayed in John 17 that the church would be one as he and the father are one, so that the world might know that God sent Jesus. That is something I know that God's interested in seeing actually happen, namely that the world would know that God sent Jesus. And this, Jesus said, would happen, or at least a prerequisite for it happening would be that the people who name themselves Christians, who call themselves by his name, would be one body and evidently so.

Now, when I say evidently so, I want to clarify, as I must each time, I'm not talking about organizational unity. I'm not talking about all the churches closing their buildings down and renting a big coliseum or a big stadium and having all the Christians in one town

meeting in one big monstrous church. That's not the kind of unity that we have in mind here.

I don't think it's the kind of unity that Jesus had in mind. It's not a problem if Christians in towns meet in different locations, in different congregations. That's, frankly, better in a way, because if all Christians in a town were in one place, you'd only get to know very few of them and it wouldn't be very personal.

It's desirable that Christians in town meet in smaller groups, but that they recognize that they are all one body nonetheless, and not just as a matter of confessed doctrine. And I think all Christians actually actually already would confess that. If I said to any Christian you meet, do you think all the Christians are one body in Christ? I would think that almost every Christian who has ever opened the Bible, even for a moment, would come back with the answer yes.

But the question next that would follow is, are you one body with the people across town in a church that you don't agree with? To the same extent you're in the same body with the church that you do agree with. And while people might say yes, that's not the way we usually think or act, at least a lot of people don't. I can't answer for you, I don't know how you act.

I do know how many Christians act, and that is that only those people that really conform a great deal to their own distinctives, that is to the person who's making the judgment, each of us has certain distinctives in belief and practice and culture. And when we find people who match up with us that way, we feel like we're among brother. When we go someplace or someone joins us, or we are in company with people who don't hold all the same views we do, or don't have the same religious culture, or all the same behaviors or style of worship or whatever, sometimes we don't feel so much like we're among brother.

We might know as a theological point that we are, but we don't necessarily love everybody who isn't like us. And that's why Paul talked about the need for this supernatural unity. You know, the first division that existed in the body of Christ was between the Jews and the Gentiles.

The Jews, for centuries before Christ came, had believed that they were a separate people, and they were a separate people from the Gentiles. They were God's chosen people. They were set apart.

They were circumcised. They lived by laws that God had given them. The Gentiles didn't live by those laws.

The Gentiles were unclean. They worshiped idols. They were uncircumcised.

And the Jews looked down on Gentiles. Now, when Jews and Gentiles ended up both

being in the same congregation, this caused some difficulties in some churches because the Jews felt that the Gentiles should get circumcised if they're gonna be in the same church with them, or should keep kosher, or should at least observe the Jewish holy days. Paul wrote to the Roman church and addressed that very problem in the church.

He said, some people there wanna keep one day holy. Others in the church don't wanna keep one day holy. They wanna keep every day alike.

Some people in the church want to have a restricted diet. Some people in church don't wanna have a restricted diet. And Paul simply says, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

He didn't say, I'll give you the right answer. I see you guys don't know what the right answer is. I can tell you the right answer is A. He didn't say that.

He didn't sort it out for them. Certainly Paul knew what the right answer was, but he did not say, okay, everyone conform to what I say. He said, everyone conform to what your conscience before God says.

Let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind. And he says, you who restrict your diets, don't judge those who don't restrict their diets. And he said, you who don't restrict your diets, don't despise those who do.

What they do, he that eats, eats unto the Lord. He that does not eat to the Lord, he does not eat. He that observes the day, observes it unto the Lord.

He that doesn't observe the day to the Lord, he does not observe it. In other words, we're all living for the Lord. And each of us has got to be given the liberty to follow the Lord and not be judged by people who think that we should do it differently, so long as we're not sinning.

So long as we're not doing something that Jesus forbade, because he's the Lord and we have to obey him, obviously. When a Christian disobeys Jesus, then that's a matter for church discipline. But when there's no disobedience of Christ, but there's just different opinions about, do you want to fast on Tuesdays and Thursdays? I don't want to, do you? Well, if you do, good on you, do it.

Don't ask me to do it and don't judge me if I don't. Jesus didn't say I had to do that. And don't judge people who differ from you if they're not sinning, and sinning is disobeying Jesus Christ, the Lord.

Now, if we have one Lord and one faith and one baptism and one God and father of all, as Paul said in Ephesians 4, then we are one body, we have unity in the spirit. And he said, you need to keep that, unity of the spirit and the bond of peace until we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God unto a mature man to

the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, he said in Ephesians 4. So there is a unity of the spirit that we have because God made it. He put his same spirit in every person who's a real Christian.

Everyone has the same Holy Spirit. And that means since there's only one Holy Spirit and he's in all of us, we are now one organism sharing one spirit. And we're to maintain that unity of the spirit.

But Paul said, until we come to the unity of the faith, that is till we all believe alike. And to the unity of the knowledge of the son of God, that means till we all know the same amount. You see, the reason that we disagree with each other is some of us know more than others.

Some of us are right, some of us are wrong. We all think we're right, but obviously everyone can't be right. And if some people are wrong, that means they don't know as much as the people who are right.

Now, the problem is we don't really and truly know who's right and who's wrong about a lot of the issues. Certainly we know about many issues. We know the Bible is fairly plain.

On some issues, the Bible is not quite so plain. And some Christians read it that way and some Christians read it that way. And sure, the people on the right think they're right and the people on the left, they think they're right.

But thinking you're right doesn't mean you are. The fact is somebody who thinks they're right is wrong. And that's not because someone's trying to be wrong.

It's because someone doesn't know as much as somebody else. And we don't have unity in the knowledge of the Son of God. We don't have the same degree of knowledge, all of us.

We're growing, we're learning. We don't have unity of the faith. We don't all believe the same things on every point.

And Paul said, that's okay. Until we come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to a mature man, we need to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And we're not even very good at that.

You see, the reason is because we've decided that what's more important is unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. We've decided that agreeing with each other on arcane theological points actually is definitive of fellowship. And it's not, can't be.

That's why Paul said, you guys keep one day, you guys don't keep day. Hey, you're in the same fellowship. Don't judge each other, just love each other.

Do what you feel in your conscience to do in that matter. And so maintaining unity is the goal. Now we need strategies for this because the devil has strategies against us.

Paul said, we must not let the devil have an advantage over us. In 2 Corinthians 2, 11, he says, for we are not ignorant of his devices. That is his strategies.

The devil is making war against the saints. And one thing he really doesn't want is for the saints to be one and for the world to know that Jesus was sent by God. That's really something the devil has a vested interest in preventing from happening.

And so he uses his best efforts, his best strategies to prevent us from acting like we're really one family, like we're one body, but we are. And so we've been talking about strategies that we can adopt. We know the devil has strategies he employs against us.

If we've got no strategies he has against him, we're just sitting ducks. He's just gonna have his way with the church as he's been doing to a certain extent for the past 2000 years, dividing and dividing and keeping dividing and keeping hostilities going. It's amazing to me, 2000 years after Christ came and prayed that prayer, there are still Christians who are hostile to other Christians.

And for what reason? Beats me. They just don't agree about something. There's something they don't agree about.

So they don't wanna meet together. They don't wanna fellowship together. This is so juvenile.

This is so infantile, Paul said. Paul said, I couldn't treat you like mature people. I couldn't feed you with solid food.

I didn't give you milk because you're like babes. He said, as long as you are saying, I'm of Paul and I'm of Apollos and I'm of Cephas, you're babes, you're carnal. And it's amazing that a church 2000 years old could still be so infantile because these traits are still there.

Now, by the way, we think we're near the end of the world. Every generation of Christians actually has thought they were, and we might be the right ones. But of course, we could be just another generation that's wrong about that too.

Some people suggest the church is still in its infancy and will go on for thousands of more years and we're just still in the toddlerhood stage of the church. And by the evidence of unity or lack thereof, one could make an argument for that. But someday, Paul said, we're gonna come to a mature man.

That is the church corporately as the body of Christ is gonna become a mature body. And that's gonna be seen by unity in the faith, unity in the knowledge of the Son of God to a

mature man, the church will come eventually. I would like to think it'll happen next week or tonight or a year from now at the latest.

But I've been hoping that for 43 years. I've actually been teaching about unity in the church since I began the ministry when I was 17 years old. And frankly, sometimes I think I see progress, sometimes there's setbacks that really surprised me.

And so I don't know, don't know how near we are. But certainly we know that God has a goal that he's working toward and that is a body of believers who really act like they're a body of believers, who really act like they're family, who really don't just say that we all have one father and we're all brothers, but really act like it and act like they believe what they say. And so we're studying different possible strategies.

They're all biblical strategies for us to maintain unity at least in our corner. We can't change the whole church ourselves. The Holy Spirit's gonna have to do that, but we can change ourselves and we can change the dynamics of the unity or lack thereof in the circle of people that we connect with.

And we do, we all regularly connect with some Christians somewhere. And by the way, one of the problems is that a lot of times we only connect with the ones that we've kept in our circle and we've isolated other people for reasons that aren't particularly valid. And yet we do have contact with Christians from time to time who aren't in our circles and we need to behave toward them the way that Christ wants us to behave.

And the devil will do whatever he can to put a wedge between brothers, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, Christians of different denominations, anybody, any two people that are Christians, the devil would like to divide. The devil would like to destroy relationships. And so we're looking at what the Bible actually says in terms of how we as Christians can employ strategies that God gives us to be more unified.

In our last lecture, we took the first two points on the backside of the sheep, humble yourself. Humble yourself, that's a strategy. And why? Because humbling yourself is a prerequisite for resisting the devil.

And since this is a warfare, and since the devil is attacking us at the level of our relationships, we can't resist him as long as we're not humble. The scripture says that, humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, resist the devil and he'll flee from you and so forth. We took some scriptures about that last time.

It's also a precondition for Christian unity to be humble because it says in Proverbs 13, verse 10, only by pride comes contention. So you're not gonna have any contention if there's no pride. Wherever there's contention, wherever people aren't getting along, somebody is proud.

Human beings, what they are, it's usually both parties because people, we tend toward

pride, we lean toward pride as a natural instinct. But even if one person humbles himself, the other person can still cause a problem because of their pride. But where there is no pride, there's no contention.

You see, if I'm tending to separate from someone who doesn't see things the way I see them, why am I doing that? What's my problem? Why don't I just embrace that person with their differences of opinion? Why not? Because I'm proud. Because I don't want to suggest that what I think may not be superior to what they think. Or that what I think doesn't make me better Christian, closer to God, or whatever.

And if I feel that my closeness to God or my standing with God is based upon my being right about things, and by the way, people kind of just have that as a default opinion a lot of times. If I'm right about doctrine, God is more pleased. And many people are very afraid about being wrong about anything.

That's why when they've been established in some doctrinal view and they hear a different view, it threatens them. Like, whoa, whoa, what if that person changes me? Well, what if he does? Is God letting you into heaven because you have all the right opinions? Is that how you get to heaven? Does God accept you or reject you because you've got all the right views? If you think so, then you need to learn what salvation is. Salvation is by grace.

Salvation is God accepts you because you have surrendered humbly to him. And now he wants you to humble yourself before your brethren and say, you know what? I think you're wrong, but I could be wrong. And you need to say the same thing.

You got to know that I could be right. Neither of us knows for sure. I'm pretty sure.

But you have as much right to reach your conclusions as you study the scripture, as I grant myself the right to do, to reach my own conclusions. I'm not more important than you. I don't have more rights than you do.

I've reached my conclusions from hearing and thinking and sorting out the scriptures. I've come to certain conclusions. I assume you've done the same and somehow you reach different conclusions.

Now, I can either think you're stupid or I can just think, well, one of us may be stupid or maybe we're both not so stupid, but we're just on the path to finding out something that's hard to figure out. And you might've figured something out that I haven't figured out yet or vice versa. The main thing is I don't have to prove to you that I'm the one who's ahead in my knowledge.

I don't have to convince myself that I know more than you do because I don't find my security in knowing a lot of stuff. I find my security in knowing Jesus. And if you find your security in knowing Jesus, we can humble ourselves and say, you know, I just can't see

why you see it that way, but I assume you're as smart a guy as I am.

So I'm not gonna assume that you're an evil person or a stupid person. I'm just gonna assume I've got a blind spot or you do and we got to help each other through that. We got to keep fellowship and keep loving each other.

And eventually one of us will see our way clear. Maybe we'll both find out we're both wrong. And the third thing is right.

You never know. The main point is to be able to say I could be wrong or to be able to be the one who stops arguing first. It's okay to argue, I think.

A lot of people find arguing unpleasant and they don't like to see arguments. I'm not one of those. I think truth is best arrived at through considering the best arguments for every side.

But arguing doesn't have to be contentious. Arguing can be a mutual exploration of the truth. You know, I've got reasons for what I believe.

You've got reasons for you believe. Let me hear your arguments. Why don't you hear my arguments? Why don't we see which side has the best arguments? Because frankly the truth always has the best arguments.

So if we hear the arguments, we're more likely to be able to figure out what the truth is. And if we don't figure it out in this conversation, we're not gonna judge each other because we didn't convince each other. You're not my servant.

I can't judge another man's servant. You're God's servant. If he hasn't opened your eyes to that or he hasn't opened mine, well, leave it to God.

We're just supposed to humbly accept one another. And the more you humble yourself, the more impossible it is for there to be contention between you. Humility, radical humility, which is like that of Jesus who existed in the form of God and did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself and took on himself the form of a servant.

And then he further humbled himself and to the death of the cross. That's humility. And Paul says, I want you to be of one mind in Philipians chapter two, where he gives that information.

He says, in lowliness of mind, considering others better than yourself, let this mind be in you that was in Christ. And then he goes into that what I just said. Christ was in the form of God.

He humbled himself. That's how you become of one mind. That's how you become one spirit.

That's how you become unified, by humbling yourself. Only by pride comes contention, the Bible says in Proverbs 13, 10. The second thing we saw last time was that you need to know what comes first.

And what comes first is God's family. That is the fact that we are family matters more than any other differences that exist among us. Now, of course, not everyone who calls himself a Christian is a real one.

I acknowledge this. I'm not saying that everybody who wears the label Christian is one of my brothers or sisters. But the truth is, some of them may be that I'm not sure about.

I do know this, that a true Christian is one who's devoted to following Jesus. If I find someone who calls himself a Christian and consistently they show no interest in following Jesus, they're living in sin, you point out their error, they couldn't care less, they just wanna keep living in sin. Well, I've got a pretty good idea they're probably not really a follower of Jesus.

It's easy to call yourself a Christian. It's much different to actually take up your cross and follow Jesus. But lots of people who have literally taken up their cross and follow Jesus still have a lot of flaws.

And a lot of the flaws are in their understanding of things or in other areas. But they are family. If they're truly born again people, if they're real disciples of Jesus, they're my family.

And even members of my biological family don't all see everything alike. Fortunately, we don't have a lot of differences, but some families do. Some families have huge differences among members of the family, but they still are family.

They still get together. They still eat together. They still love each other.

They still come to each other's aid. They act like family. And putting the family of God, the relationship that God has established first priority over other areas that we'd prefer for people who like us, that's a strategy that the Bible gives.

And I won't go into it now. The scriptures in the notes, if you missed the lecture last time, are there. I want to broach new material tonight, and that is C in the notes, where it says, everyone say the same thing.

Well, that sounds easy, doesn't it? Let's just all say the same thing. Which of us is gonna set the standard for all the others to say the same thing? There's a lot of pastors whose attitude is, yeah, we're gonna have unity in the church, and that means everyone says what I say. Everyone thinks what I think.

Everyone agrees with me. Okay, well, if you're not gonna agree with the pastor, who are

you gonna agree with? Some other guy? One of the deacons, the janitor? What are you gonna do? How are you gonna decide who we're all gonna say the same thing as? I mean, we've got Presbyterians down the street. We got Baptists next door.

We got Roman Catholics across the street. We've got Lutherans in town. We've got Pentecostals.

These all don't say the same things about certain issues. So how can we say the same things? Well, I can answer that question from Scripture. If you look at 1 Corinthians 1, this is where Paul actually tells us we need to say the same things as each other.

It's in a strong appeal that he makes for unity in the church of Corinth, and in the opening three or four chapters, Paul's main concern in the church of Corinth is their disunity, and saying I'm of Paul, I'm of Cephas, and so forth. And in chapter one of 1 Corinthians, verse 10, Paul says, now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Okay, well, that's a simple remedy.

All this 2,000 years of division could have been solved if we'd just done this, just say the same thing. So you guys already say, you wanna say the same thing I say? Well, some people might, some would not. Okay, then who, I'm not sure I wanna say the same thing you're saying.

So how in the world are we gonna work this out? Too many people are saying different things. How are we gonna decide what the same thing is that everyone's supposed to say? Well, fortunately, he doesn't mean we need to say the same thing about everything. We don't have to have the same favorite flavor of ice cream, for example.

There are individual differences in taste and even in opinion about some things. But how can Paul really think it practical for all Christians to say the same thing unless we're told which things we're supposed to say? Well, he goes on and explains himself. In verse 10 there, he says, you should all speak the same thing.

But then he says what he's talking about, verse 11. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, from those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, or I am of Cephas, or I am of Christ.

They're not saying the same thing. They're saying four different things. You're all supposed to say the same thing when it comes to this.

No one's supposed to be saying I am of Paul. No one's supposed to be saying I'm of Cephas or I'm of Apollos. But everyone's supposed to be saying I am of Christ.

You've got four different things being said. I want you to say all the same thing. And if you don't know what the right thing is, listen.

Some of you are saying I'm of Paul. He says, was Paul crucified for you? Get a clue. Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Of course not.

So how can you say I'm of Paul? Ditto with Cephas, ditto with Apollos. But what about Christ? Were you baptized in the name of Christ? Did Christ die for you? He did. Okay, the light goes on.

That's what we're supposed to say. I am of Christ. No one is of Paul.

No one is of Apollos. No one is of Cephas. No one is of John Calvin or Jacob Arminius.

None of us is of Chuck Smith or of Kenneth Hagan or of Steve Gregg or anyone else, any teacher that we might listen to. That's not who we are of. We are of Christ.

And so are they, hopefully. And here's the thing. If we actually all say the same thing, namely I am of Christ.

Are you? You are too? Well, what do you think about eschatology? Oh, that's different than what I think. Well, so what? We're of Christ, right? I'm of Christ, you're of Christ? We're not of Darby. We're not of this or that thinker about eschatology.

We are of Christ. Now, if we're of Christ, nothing else can legitimately come between us. Now, does that mean we should ignore differences of opinion? Far from it.

I spend my whole life not ignoring people's differences of opinion. I invite them to call me on the radio and disagree with me all they want to. I like to talk to people who disagree with me.

And I like them to talk to me. There's nothing wrong with having disagreements about things that don't violate the one thing we're all saying. I am of Christ.

If you're of Christ, you're in the same church I'm in. Doesn't matter what church that is, you're in the same body that I'm in if you are of Christ. Now, are you premillennial, postmillennial, or amillennial? Doesn't matter.

If you're of Christ, you're in the same church I am. I'm not of amillennialism or of premillennialism or of this or that. I am of Christ.

Paul says, stop saying different things and say the same thing for a change. Stop defining yourself by doctrinal labels or theological camps. You can have those opinions if that's what you think the Bible teaches.

More power to you. God is your teacher, not me. I can't make you change your mind.

I can't require you to. God is your teacher. You have one, call no man on earth teacher, Jesus said.

You have one teacher, that is Christ. Let him teach you. Let him take his time.

If you're wrong about some things, or if I am, he can take whatever time he wants. He can bring us through. His Holy Spirit will someday lead us into all truth, but not all at the same rate.

In the meantime, we have to say, well, I'm of Christ, if you are too. The Holy Spirit hasn't led you and me into the same opinion about this particular subject over here, but must not be the most important thing to him, or else he would have done it. Maybe it shouldn't be the most important thing to us either.

What is the most important thing? Who died for you? Whose name were you baptized into? Not Paul, not Cephas, not Apollos, not anybody except Jesus. And if you are of Jesus, then you've got no grounds for identifying yourself by any smaller subcategory in a way that divides you in your heart at all from another believer who's also of Christ. It's sin.

To divide the body of Christ is sin, even if you do it in your heart. One thing Jesus made clear that was not as clear in the Old Testament as it was in the teaching of Jesus is sin can be in the heart as much as externally. Adultery can be in the heart.

Murder can be in the heart. Division can be in the heart. That God looks on the heart.

It says in the Old Testament, among the seven things that God hates and finds an abomination is he that sows discord among brethren. That's no doubt referring to external behavior that's whispering and gossiping and separating, causing strife between brethren. God hates that, but he doesn't like it anymore when it's in the heart than when it's external.

If we have divisions and bitter striving in our hearts, James said, don't boast in that. That wisdom does not come from above. It is earthly and sensual and devilish.

It's part of the devil's strategy, that divisiveness. Our strategy is to speak the same thing. I'm of Christ.

Is that person of Christ? Then we're of the same Christ. There's only one Christ out there, the real one. There's only one real Christ.

If they're following the real Christ, so am I. And that makes me their brother. And it doesn't really matter ultimately what other things we don't have in common. Although if we continue to walk together and speak the truth and love to each other, probably over time we will have more of those things in common that we don't yet.

Because if you and I disagree about something and spend time fellowshiping and accepting each other unconditionally despite the differences, I'm gonna listen to you without being threatened because you're not gonna condemn me if I don't reach your conclusions. And you're gonna listen to me for the same reason because I'm not condemning you. We can be at peace with each other.

We can listen to each other without feeling personally threatened. And eventually we can say, you know, now that you say that, I kind of see it that way too. I didn't know why you thought that, but now I see because we've been communicating.

I know now why you, and I think you might have a good point there. And it doesn't mean I come all the way over to your side, though maybe I even will, who knows? Or maybe you'll come to my side, doesn't matter. If we never reach each other's side, we're still of Christ, we're still one body, and we can appreciate the diversity, can't we? Only if we are threatened will we not.

Many people cannot appreciate the diversity in the body of Christ, and the reason they can't, there's only one reason, they are threatened. They're not finding their identity in Christ, they're finding their identity in their denominational or theological camp. And if anyone suggests that their theological camp might not be quite perfect, that threatens me personally because that's my identity.

You see, but if I am of Christ, if we're all saying the same thing, then well, are you threatening Christ? No, neither am I. Hey, I'm not threatening who you are, and you're not threatening who I am? We're unthreatened. We can talk about differences of opinion without any sense that anyone's gonna have to be thrown out if they don't come around to seeing it the other person's way. Wouldn't that be refreshing if Christians could actually talk about things they disagree with without there being the subtext, and if you don't come around to my way of seeing it, I'm just gonna have to part company with you and we're not gonna talk anymore.

That subtext exists whether it's spoken or not in many Christian conversations across denominational lines. That's sin. Paul says you need to all speak the same thing.

When you speak that same thing, I am of Christ, that means that's who you are identified with. Your identity is Christ. You're not identified with Paul even though you love Paul and his teaching, or Cephas or Apollos.

You can love Paul. You can like Apollos' teaching better than Paul's. Paul wasn't saying you couldn't like someone else's teaching more than his, but you're not of that person.

Call no one teacher. Call no one rabbi. You have one teacher, Christ.

Everyone else is just a servant of Christ for your benefit, and you are the same for their benefit. So everyone say the same thing. Now Amos 3.3 famously says, can two walk

together if they be not agreed? That's the verse I've heard quoted very many times as I was shown the door to a church.

Can you believe that ever happened to me? Can you even imagine such a thing? That anyone, any pastor would want to show me the door. Well, believe it or not, there have been pastors haven't appreciated what they had in me. And their story was, two cannot walk together unless they're agreed.

About what? About whether we like cloudy days or sunny days better? You like cloudy days? We don't agree. Oh, we can't meet together. Or that we can't agree exactly whether water should be poured over the head or sprinkled over the head or immersed for baptism.

Oh, well, then we just can't agree. We can't live together. Why not? We've already been baptized, so let's go on from there.

What is it we have to agree about? We have to agree about whose we are. Am I Paul's? Am I Christ's? Do I belong to the Baptist church? Do I belong to the Presbyterian church? Do I belong to Calvary Chapel? Do I belong to the Lutheran church, the Catholic church? No, I belong to Jesus. That's what we have to agree about.

If two don't agree about that, then they can't really walk together because they're not both Christians. But if they are both Christians, they can disagree about a host of smaller things. The only problem is, I have found many Christians, and this is surprising to me, but you'll know it's true when I say it.

Some Christians are simply not satisfied with Jesus. They need to define themselves by something a little more distinctive than just that. It's not enough to just be a garden variety Christian.

To be just identified as a follower of Christ, they find that a little too bland, a little too vanilla. They need to have some insight into who the Nephilim are or into when the rapture's gonna occur, an insight that someone else doesn't have. They need to know things that other people don't know, and that defines, that makes them feel like they're important.

They stand out because they know something other people don't know, and that's what they're about. I've met people like that. I don't know if you have or not.

There's people who, Jesus isn't enough. It's Jesus plus keeping the Jewish festivals. It's Jesus plus using the Hebrew names of God and Jesus in your conversation.

It's Jesus plus this and Jesus plus that, Jesus plus that. For me, it's just Jesus. That's enough.

Jesus is enough. Now, I can use Hebrew names for God if I want to, or if I don't, you can use them. That's okay with me, but what makes me who I am is not some little gimmicky thing that my little, this little fad that I've gotten out.

And by the way, I've been in the ministry for 43 years, mostly in charismatic circles. Charismatics are fad-driven. I mean, in 43 years, I've seen them all come.

You got the shepherding movement came, it went up. Deliverance ministries movement came in. It's not all the way up, but it's kind of past.

Other things became more interesting. The new prophetic movement, it came. It was big in the 90s.

It's not so much big unless you go to Kansas City or somewhere now. There's all these movements. There's the sozo movement now, which you get prayed for for deliverance and get rid of the soul ties and the generational sins.

That's a big fad now, too. None of this is actually, I mean, not in the Bible. You can't find any of that in the Bible unless you torture some text and say, that verse sounds a little bit like what my teacher said.

I'll go with that to support this movement. Movement after movement after movement. The word of faith movement, you name it.

They come, they have their big splash. People jump on board. They get mostly discredited or else they just get left in the dust as a new fad comes in that's more sexy.

Still, there's some people hanging on to the old one. They never really go completely away, but something else eclipses it. And there's this type of Christian that's just looking for some new thing, like the philosophers on Mars Hill.

They just come to church to hear it or say some new thing. Why? Jesus is boring to them. They need Jesus plus gold dust falling on the pages of their Bible in their meetings.

Literally, they need Jesus plus everyone falling down and laughing on the floor, barking like dogs. That's different, that's new. That'll be sexy for a while until something else comes along.

It's Jesus is not enough for everyone. It's Jesus plus Calvinism. It's Jesus plus end times expertise.

It's Jesus plus whatever is the doctrine du jour. But you know what? The church has been around for 2,000 years, and the one constant has been Jesus. Dispensationalism, it wasn't here 200 years ago.

The word of faith, it wasn't around 200 years ago. This is new stuff that comes in.

Calvinism, it came in in the fourth, fifth century.

Before that, it wasn't around. The one thing that was before that and remains is Jesus. Jesus has been the same.

The church gets into its things, but it's the main thing is Jesus, the thing that defines who we are, is I am of Christ. Now, if you like gold dust falling on your Bible, if it happens, more power to you. I'm not particularly looking for any gold dust in my Bible, and interestingly, none ever shows up.

But if that's all that to you, you can go up to Bethel or somewhere, and they'll accommodate you with that. And, you know, there's all these things going on, and the one thing that just is so clear to me, because I have all these people calling me, and say, what do you think about this? What do you think about that? What I think about that is it's interesting to people who are bored with Jesus, because Jesus isn't enough. They need Jesus plus this new gimmick, Jesus plus this new fad.

It'll be something else in five years, but right now, this is what's really all the rage. It's unstable. And, you know, if you are a Christian who is into a deliverance ministry, I'm not gonna condemn that.

I believe in deliverance. I believe in, I think demons should be cast out of people. I might not agree with everything that deliverance ministries say and stand for, but hey, you know, if you think that's what God wants you to do, then as long as you're following Jesus, I'll let God deal with whatever I think may be out of balance with you, and you have to do the same with me.

But we have to say, I am of Christ. I'm not of this new movement, that new movement, or this branch, or this denomination, this doctrine. I may hold such and such a doctrine.

I might resonate with this denomination. That's fine. There's nothing wrong with that.

We're not all supposed to be cookie-cutter, rubber-stamp people. We're individuals. I'm gonna think different.

I'm gonna feel different than you do. That's irrelevant to fellowship, should be. If I'm in Christ, you're in Christ, and there's no getting out of him, unless you get out of him to your own demise, and hopefully none of us are planning to do that.

So everyone say the same thing as simply this. Everyone say, I'm of Christ, and know what it means to be in Christ, and avoid not only the words, but the mentality that I'm really of Christ and this doctrine. Christ and this denominational distinctive.

Christ and this mode of baptism. Christ and these special feasts that we keep. Christ and these special terms we have in our fad.

You're welcome to all those things. I'll just have Christ thank you. But if you have Christ and, you still have Christ, and I do too, and so we are saying the same thing.

You just need to stop saying all that extraneous stuff that seems to make you feel superior, or on the cutting edge. By the way, it's a very, very natural tendency of carnal people to want to feel cutting edge. I remember it very well in the 70s.

I remember hearing a preacher say, in a charismatic church, which I was in, he said, you know, I just prayed, God, as you're moving in the world, don't leave me behind. I want to be on the cutting edge of what you're doing. And though not everyone says it that way, that is kind of a mentality many have.

People think God's gonna do something different every few years, and that's the cutting edge. You gotta keep changing, you gotta keep on the, riding the crest of God's wave, or else you're gonna be left behind. The cloud will have moved on, and you'll be camped in the old campground.

And to tell you the truth, most of that cloud moving, I think, is just swamp gas. It's not really a real movement of the cloud a lot of the time. It's just somebody stirring up dust, really.

But once the dust has settled, if you're following Jesus, you're still on the path. You're still right in the middle of the will of God. You're still where you're supposed to be.

Cutting edge, well, if that matters to you. What I care about is just being pleasing to God. He can put me on the cutting edge if there is a cutting edge somewhere.

But I'm not so much in, you know, the desire to be on the cutting edge is kind of an elitist kind of a thing. I mean, if you happen to have that desire, I don't mean to insult you, but if you stand back a little bit and say, why is it important for you to know something that most of the Christians haven't caught up with yet? Is it because you love the body of Christ and you're hoping that you'll have something to offer them and bring them along? Maybe, some people might have that very pure motivation. Others just like to feel like, we're the ones who know.

We're the ones who are already there. The rest will have to catch up with us. We can wait if we want, we're ahead of our time, you know? And this is a mentality that is not humble.

And it isn't quite what Paul is arguing for here when he says, just say, I'm of Christ. You can be different from other people in other ways, that's okay, but just don't think that those things matter anywhere near as much as you might tend to be tempted to think they do. Finally, for tonight, offenses.

Now, I have a longer lesson elsewhere called Refused to be Offended. I gave this lecture

many years ago. It's recorded, it's on our website, and it is the most listened to lecture of all my lectures.

Back when we had cassette tapes instead of MP3s, it was the most frequently ordered tape. Even the staff at my school, if you ever heard them say, I need to listen to that tape again, there was never any question of which one they meant. It was Refused to be Offended.

That was like the signature lecture. I didn't know why it was, well, I guess I do know why it is, but when I gave the lecture years ago, it didn't occur to me that this was gonna be a zinger. I just felt like it was just another lecture lecturing through Luke, actually, and it's a passage, and Luke got me off on this, and I gave this message, and that thing has been, and people acknowledge, I need to hear that message.

Maybe you need to hear it. It's at the website, one of the websites, Refused to be Offended. I'll give you the germ of the message right now.

What God cares about is relationships. He's made that very clear. Jesus said there's two things important.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind and strength, so that's your relationship with God. Isn't love a relationship thing? And he said, and love your neighbor as you love yourself. Well, that's a relationship too.

You've got a vertical and a horizontal relationship, and he said, that's all. Everything else hangs on those two things. The one thing necessary is love, and if you are consistent in loving toward God and toward people, you're pleasing to God.

God wants us to have loving relationships with each other. Now, these relationships are damaged by what? More than any other thing. Now, probably you're gonna think I'm gonna say sin, and that would be true that sin does damage relationships, but there's another element that has to be present for the relationship to truly be damaged, and that is an offense.

You see, you may sin against me, but if I don't take offense, it's not gonna bother my relationship with you. If you borrow money from me and say, I'll pay you back tomorrow, and you never pay it back, well, that's a sin against me, but if I don't take offense, I say, oh, well, no big deal, I love him anyway. I'm not gonna let that get me bent out of shape, and I don't take offense, the relationship is not problematic, right? It's not sin by itself that breaks fellowship between Christians, although certainly it can legitimately do so, but the element in all things that divide and alienate people is an offense.

Somebody gives an offense, and the other person takes offense. If neither of those things happen, relationships do not become injured. Now, the Bible has a lot to say about this, actually.

We won't look tonight at all that it has to say. That's why I said I'll have a separate lecture called Refuse to be Offended, but the reason that lecture has that title is because it was clear to me reading the scripture so many years ago that one of the things that was most unpleasant in all relationships was offenses, especially unresolved offenses, but then unresolved offenses is what offenses are. If they're resolved, they're not offenses anymore, but the idea is that somebody has taken offense, and they're holding something against someone.

What is offense? Offense is like a low-grade anger, bitterness, resentment towards somebody because they did something, and you're not letting them off the hook for it. That's taking offense. Now, as long as I am taking offense, I am injuring the body of Christ.

Now, I might say, but I'm taking offense to a very legitimate offense. This person really did hurt me. Well, maybe they did.

Do I have to take offense? Am I under obligation to take offense? No. Do I enjoy being offended? Not really. It's kind of unpleasant to walk around with resentment and anger and unpleasantness toward people.

If you don't know this by experience, I'll just tell you. One of the most happy lives that I can imagine is one where you walk around with a clean conscience, and you're not holding anything against anyone. Now, that can be, if you are obligated to take offense when someone does you wrong, well, then you're in trouble because they can ruin your day.

They can ruin your life because anyone can offend you if you're offendable, but the Bible indicates you are not under obligation to take offense. Now, let me make this very clear what I'm talking about and not talking about. I'm not talking about that we shouldn't be offended by injustice in the world, or that we shouldn't be offended by horrible behavior on the part of sinners or governments or whatever.

What I'm talking about is the way people treat me, me taking a personal offense to a personal slight or a personal injury, all right? That's the kind of offending we're talking about. That's what I'm talking about. There's two parts about offenses, and this is part of our strategies for unity.

One is, of course, avoid giving offense, and the other is to avoid taking offense. Now, on the first point, look at Proverbs 18. Proverbs 18, 19, it says, a brother offended, there's an offense there, a brother offended is harder to win than a strong city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Now, if you got bars of the castle between you and someone else, that's not unity. And if they're strong bars, they're gonna prevent unity from ever coming about. Contentions

between brethren are like bars of a castle.

A brother offended is harder to be won than winning over a city, if you're bringing an army to conquer a city. It's easier, in other words, for an army to conquer a city than for you to win back a brother you've offended. The bottom line out of this, the take home from this is don't do it, don't offend your brother unnecessarily.

And Paul often talked about the need to limit your own freedoms, if necessary, to prevent offending a brother. You may feel the liberty to eat meat, sacrifice to idols. If your brother doesn't, don't offend him, don't do it in front of him.

Now, I don't know anyone in our society who that's an issue for, eating meat, sacrifice to idols, unless you live in Santa Cruz and you go to one of the Krishna fairs or something, they offer you food that was offered to Krishna or something, which happens once in a while in Santa Cruz, where I used to live. But in our modern society, we don't hear much about meat, sacrifice to idols. Alcohol, that would be something a little more.

In our society, you got liberty to drink alcohol, good, drink it alone, drink it at home. Don't drink it in front of people who'll be offended and stumble by it, if you have that liberty. Don't do things unnecessarily that offend people because you break that person's, if they are weak, especially, and Paul talks about people offending the weak brother.

If they're weak, they don't know how to resist the offense, they take offense, and then there's a problem in the relationship, yours with them and theirs with God eventually. Paul says you might actually end up destroying a brother from whom Christ died if you unnecessarily offend him. To give offense is something to avoid as much as possible.

Sometimes you can't help it, I suppose. Remember, the disciples came to Jesus once and said, Lord, don't you know that what you said offended the Pharisees? He said, well, every plant that my father's not planting is gonna be plucked up. In other words, they're not God's people.

Anyway, they're easily offendable and they're not even planted properly. They're not God's people, so I'm not gonna worry too much how much they get offended. There is such a thing as the offense of the cross, of course.

If you represent Jesus perfectly, as Jesus represented perfectly Jesus, there were people offended. And there are things about standing for truth that people will find offensive. You can't avoid that, you can't compromise that.

I'm talking about when your personal liberties become more important to you than whether your actions offend another brother. You need to avoid giving offenses unnecessarily. But of course, you don't have the absolute power about that because some people get offended just if you walk in the room and you don't smell as good as

they think you should or you're not dressed the way they think you should be dressed or something.

There are people who are easily offended, so easily that you can't do anything without offending. Have you ever had anyone you lived with who you had to walk on eggs around? You know the expression? What's that about, walking on eggs? It's that you're living with somebody that you have to guard everything you say and do because they are offended by every action that is not intended to offend them. That's not maturity, but that's something we have to deal with.

There are people who are not very mature and we have to do what we can not to offend them unnecessarily. And sometimes that does mean we have to walk on eggs and it's too bad. It's too bad that somebody else's immaturity has to impinge on our liberty as much as it does.

But Paul said, well, it's a matter of loving your brother. You can give up your liberty. You can give that up in order to keep the peace.

The peace is more important than your liberty to do the thing that you think you should have the liberty to do. But the other side is what if you're the person who tends to be offended? This is where I think the Bible gives instructions that are almost unique to Christianity. It's a unique strategy that God has given us.

And that is refuse to take offense, refuse to be offended. Can that really be done? Now, some people think I'm kind of machine-like. They just think that I'm very cerebral and that it's easy for me to just not be offended when people do things wrong.

But some people are more emotional and they just say, this is impossible. What you're saying is impossible. There's a friend of mine, good friend of mine and his wife, she just, when she heard refuse to be offended, she's like, Steve, he's not realistic.

You can't not be offended. Well, guess what? You can, maybe not humanly. But did you think you're supposed to live your Christian life in your human strength? Boy, if you were thinking that, you've got a whole new wake up call.

You're not supposed to be living your Christian life in your human strength. With Christ, you can do all things, especially all things that he requires you to do. And one of them he requires you to do is on many occasions to not take offense.

And the more spiritual you become, the more Christ-like you become, the less likely you are to take offense. In Proverbs chapter 19, I wanna show you three verses in Proverbs if you'd actually turn there with me. In Proverbs 19, verse 11, it says, the discretion of a man, and this means his wisdom, the soundness of his mind.

The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger and his glory is to overlook a

transgression. Not to overlook his own transgression, to overlook somebody else's transgression against him. It's a glory, it's a privilege you have.

You've got the privilege of overlooking it if somebody does something offensive to you. Now you might say, why in the world would I do that? They don't deserve to be let off the hook. And this is really a way that some people thought.

I remember having a friend who was really just bugged for several weeks because someone had done something to him and they didn't even know they'd done it. And they didn't even know he was mad, but he's just steaming about it. I said, you know, why are you angry? Are you just trying to punish them? It's not working.

They don't even know you're mad, you're punishing yourself. Why even be mad? Because they deserve for me to be mad at them. Well, a lot of it's hurting them, isn't it? You know, you feel like, I just can't release this because they don't deserve to have this released.

Well, does God deserve to have you release it? That's the issue. I have done wrong things to people sometimes. I really have.

I've sinned against people on occasion. And once there was a man who I'd sinned against significantly, and he was very angry at me. And we were dialoguing about trying to make some reconciliation.

And I said, you know, I've repented, I've apologized, I've asked you to forgive me. I said, you don't owe it to me to forgive me because I did you wrong. You don't owe me your forgiveness, but you owe it to God.

You owe it to Jesus. You're a follower of Christ. He said to forgive.

I'm not claiming that I deserve to be forgiven, but Jesus deserves to have you forgive me because that's what he wants you to do. You owe it to him. And it is possible to pay those debts that you owe to Jesus.

You can forgive if he wants you to, if he requires you to. He'll give you the grace to do it. Now, it says here, it's a man's wisdom.

We might say his spirituality makes him slow to anger. Christians do get angry too about the right things, I hope. But you should be slow to anger.

You shouldn't have a short fuse. You shouldn't have a hair trigger. You shouldn't be the kind of person that if someone says something that's just, you know, great, you just blow up or you just get angry at them.

A wise spiritual person is slow to anger and it is his glory to overlook a transgression. It is your privilege to do that. If someone transgresses against you, if that's an occasion

they're giving an offense, you don't have to take it.

You can't give me this offense because I'm not gonna take it, thanks. I can overlook it. I can.

Now, why would I? It's a very reasonable thing to do. And this is why I first came up with this idea of refusing to be offended from reading the scriptures. I thought, well, you know, when you think about it, the person who has wronged me in some way, there's really only two possibilities here.

They intended to wrong me or they didn't intend to. That is, they are hostile toward me and they're trying to get my goat or they are not hostile. They're just clueless.

They didn't know that the thing they said or did was insensitive. They didn't know that that bothered me. And by the way, wives, be very mindful of this.

Your husbands don't know most of the things they say that offend you. They're just clueless. They don't know.

They didn't intend it. Now, some of them might. I can't speak for all of them.

Some husbands might just be rude and unkind. But most Christian husbands, they don't want to offend their wives. But in many cases, they inadvertently do it a lot.

But you see, the wife needs to understand, well, he probably didn't intend that in a way that was intended to be hostile. An intelligent, wise person would think that about anyone. Give them the benefit of the doubt.

They probably aren't such a wicked person that they're just trying to ruin my life. They're probably just not paying attention. They're insensitive.

Well, that's a weakness on their part. And if they're weak, I should be strong. I should be strong enough to bear with their weakness, Paul said.

Now, here's the thing. If the thing that they did to me that is offensive to me, if they did it by accident or unknowingly, what a jerk I am to hold it against them. What a small-minded, thin-skinned person I am to take offense to something that they didn't intend any offense for.

They didn't have any ill feelings toward me. They didn't know they were saying something that was gonna bug me. Then I should be man enough, or woman enough, if that's the gender I am, I should be mature enough to say, well, that hurt a little bit, but they don't know it hurt.

They didn't intend it. I'm not gonna hold it against them. Everybody's got their blind spots.

I'm sure I've got mine. I want them to forgive me when I have my blind spots. I should forgive them for theirs.

It's small-minded in the extreme to take offense to something that someone didn't intend to offend you about, and that's one possibility. I think in most cases, that's what it is. When offensive things happen, usually the person didn't intend it, and therefore, you've got no grounds for taking offense.

But what about the other case? What if they didn't intend to offend you? Well, why should I let them have their way with me? If they want me to be offended, am I just at the mercy of whoever wants to offend me? I just have to live with resentment and anger because somebody didn't treat me right? I don't wanna surrender my spiritual condition to somebody else. It was Will Rogers, actually, who was not a Christian as far as I know, but sort of a philosopher, cowboy, comedian-type guy, but he said something very profound once. He said, I am at the mercy of anyone who can make me lose my temper.

I mean, think about it. If someone can make you lose your temper, then you're at their mercy, if they can make you do that. If they can dictate to you what your inner response is going to be to them, then you're not in control of your own spirit at all.

Now, by the way, this scripture we saw where it's a glory to overlook an offense, look at another proverb here immediately after, in chapter 16, verse 32, Proverbs 16, 32. It says, he who is slow to anger, oh, that's that same expression. Remember, the discretion of a man makes him slow to anger.

Well, here it says, he who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit is greater than the man who can take a city. Alexander the Great could take many cities. He could never rule his spirit.

He actually drank himself to death when he was 33 years old. He couldn't control his own inner man. He could conquer any number of cities, but it takes more of a man to rule his spirit than to conquer a city.

If you're stronger than someone else, you can beat them up, but you're not stronger than yourself, so beating yourself down, restraining yourself, that takes something more. He that rules his spirit and is slow to anger is better than a mighty man who can take a city. Notice that ruling your spirit and being slow to anger are used interchangeably here.

This is what it means to rule your spirit. There's a provocation in your world. Somebody's provoking you to anger, but you don't get angry.

Not so quick, anyway. You wait and decide, is this something I should get angry about or not? I'm not just gonna be angry because someone wants to make me angry. Why should I let them have their way with me? I'm going to think about this, see if this is

something I ought to be angry about or not.

See if God is angry about it. See if God wants me to be angry about it. If not, I'm gonna put it away.

I'm gonna rule my spirit, not someone else rule my spirit. And look at Proverbs 25, 28 on this matter of ruling the spirit, which in Proverbs is the same thing as being slow to anger. Proverbs 25, 28 says, whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down without walls.

Now in those days, the main defense a city had against invasion was walls, physical walls. But if a city's walls were broken down, they were subject to invasion. What's it like to be a city broken down without walls? It means you're gonna be ruled by somebody else.

You've got no defenses against invaders who just come take over and they're gonna rule your city. To not rule your own spirit is gonna guarantee that someone else is gonna rule your spirit. If somebody can get you angry, can make you offended by what they do, they're ruling your spirit.

But ruling your spirit is your responsibility and your privilege. You don't have to become offended. You don't have to become angry.

You don't have to become resentful. You can just say, they may wanna make me mad, but hey, I'm just not in the mood to get mad today, thanks. I'm not interested in being mad at you.

I think the Lord wants me to love my enemies. And if you wanna make yourself an enemy, then that defines for me what I'm supposed to do. I'm supposed to love you and do good to you, do good to those who persecute you.

Jesus said we're supposed to love those people. And if they can instead make us not love them by breaking the relationship, by creating alienation and offense, they are ruling my spiritual condition. And I'm just not willing to let anyone do that, but me and God.

He that rules his spirit is greater than the mighty. He that does not rule his spirit is like a city broken down and without walls. He's gonna be invaded and controlled by other personalities, not himself.

That's just not okay. That's not what God allows. It says in 1 Corinthians 13, five, love is not provoked.

1 Corinthians 13, five, love is not provoked. In 1 John it says, he that loves his brother walks in the light and there's no occasion of stumbling or of offense in him. If you love your brother, you're gonna say, you know, the relationship between me and that person,

because God says so, that's the first priority.

Not whether I like what that person did to me, not whether that person even wants to be my friend or not, but that God wants me to love him. I'm gonna love that person and that's for the glory of God. I'm here for the glory of God.

I'm gonna love that person no matter what they do. Probably, if I do that consistently enough, they're gonna stop being so nasty toward me, but that's not even my object. My object is not necessarily to win them, but to glorify God in my response to them.

And I can, if I wish, refuse to take any offense someone wants to hand over to me. And I should. This is a uniquely Christian strategy.

If you don't have Christ, it doesn't make sense. Because if you don't have Christ, you have to defend yourself against everyone who's hostile to you. But Paul says, brethren, do not avenge yourselves.

Leave room for God's wrath, for God has said vengeance is mine. I will repay. Paul says, therefore, if your enemy hungers, feed him.

If your enemy is thirsty, give him drink. In so doing, you'll heap coals of fire upon his head. That means that he'll leave the matter to God to bring the judgment.

God is forestalling the judgment for now, and if he wants to judge, he can. If he doesn't want to, that's his business. I'm gonna leave it to God.

I'm not gonna avenge myself. That's against the rules of Christianity. It's against love in relationships.

It's against the unity of the brethren. I'm gonna be unified with everyone who does not prevent it. And if they prevent it, I'm still gonna think of them.

If they're a Christian, I'm gonna still think of them as my brother and treat them that way, because that's what Christians are supposed to do. That's how people will know I'm a disciple, if I have love one for another. And so, love is not provoked.

Now, love can get provoked, but you have to decide that this is something I am gonna get angry about. This is something I'm supposed to do something about. It's not something someone did to me.

It's usually something that some injustice out there I'm supposed to do some kind of intervention in. But when people do things to me, I'm just not easily offended. I never have been, but I have especially been hard to offend since I realized what the Bible teaches on this particular thing.

It's so enjoyable not being offended. If you can love unconditionally, then that means

you're a Christian. And if you can love unconditionally, you never have to take offense, because people don't have to meet any conditions for you to love them.

But if you're not a Christian, if you don't love unconditionally, then of course, you're gonna have a lot more hard time with this. But these are Christian strategies. They're biblical strategies for unity.

And so, to avoid giving offense and avoid taking offense is this strategy that is quite New Testament, even Old Testament, quite biblical. And that's what we're gonna end tonight. Because of the time and because we've got some other points to take in our next lecture.

So Father, I pray that the things that your word has to say to us to transform us, to modify us, to correct us, to do all those things that the word of God can do for us. I pray that that word will be implanted in hearts that are good soil so that it can take root, that can change, and it can change us. And I pray, Father, that because we begin to implement the instructions that we actually have from you in terms of how to conduct ourselves in these relationships, that we will be just totally aware that we are of Christ along with everyone else who is of Christ.

We'll all speak the same thing. And we will all recognize how the devil wants to use offenses to create wedges and division in the body of Christ and to prevent the testimony of Christ from being effective and credible in the world. Lord, we want to be mature enough, loving enough, wise enough that we act in a way that glorifies you in this area of offenses.

We know that if we really avoid offenses, we will avoid division. And so Father, help us to see where the devil is trying to make us offended. Even later tonight, in conversations we have with other people or people we think about, or maybe there's some people already in our lives that we don't see very often, but we know we're offended.

We know there's a rift there. Father, help us to know what we're supposed to do, how to repent, how to go to them, how to seek reconciliation, how to glorify you in all of our relationships, because this life is not about us and our comfort and our vindication. This life is about Jesus being glorified in the world, finding out who he is.

And that's the one task we want to be on. And we ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. All right, we are technically done.

If you need to leave, want to leave, feel free.