

Greetings. Welcome to Session 5 in this series on “Abounding in the Good Works of God.” In session two we talked about God's unconditional love. We pointed out a significant truth from 1st John chapter 4, verse 20 where the scriptures say that a person cannot truly say that they love God unless they love their brother. In 1st John chapter 4, verse 11 God is exhorting us to love one another. In this session we will focus on applying this verse in a practical way towards our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Galatians 6:10

So then, while we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, but especially to those who are of the household of the faith.

God admonishes us to love all people in the world. But we learn from this verse that, above all else, we are to be especially good to our fellow members in the faith. Although we may disagree on certain issues, we are to treat them with kindness, consideration, thoughtfulness and selfless love. And now we turn to a very powerful verse.

Ephesians 4:16

from whom the whole body, being fitted together and held together by every supporting ligament, with each individual part doing its proper function, produces the growth of the body with the goal of building itself up in love.

God's vision is that the body of Christ will work together, with each part contributing towards the growth of the whole. He has equipped each of us with a unique function which is to be utilized to support growth for the entire body of Christ. This is not me talking, this is what God says. And when he says, “the whole body” he means “the whole body!” And when he says, “every part” he means “every part.” According to this verse, the entire body is supposed to be working together. The ministries that God has given to you and I have not been put here just so we can serve a small circle of Christians within our church or fellowship. God desires our ministries to be a blessing for everyone in the body of Christ, worldwide.

In practice, I think it is safe to say that many Christians are not currently carrying this out. Sadly, instead of choosing to work together and supporting one another, many have gone in the opposite direction, choosing instead to fight and bicker over both doctrinal and practical

issues. This division amongst Christians is nothing new. It was going on in the first century church.

1 Corinthians 1:10

Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, 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 made complete by having the same mind and by the same judgment.

This verse is addressed to the “brothers and sisters,” meaning all men and women in the body of Christ. The word “urge” means to “strongly beseech” and the authority behind this urging is our Lord Jesus Christ. What God wants us to do is to have the same mind, the same judgment and to speak the same thing. That there be no division. That is a very tall order, isn't it? I will tell you right now that you and I cannot do this of our own ability and strength. The only way this is going to happen is if we choose to put our trust in God and allow his wisdom to guide us and his strength to see it through. Let's read further to discover what division he is talking about that needs to be addressed.

1 Corinthians 1:11-12

11 For I have been informed about you, my brothers and sisters, by Chloe's followers, that there are quarrels among you.

12 What I mean is this: that each one of you says, "I am of Paul," "But I of Apollos," "But I of Cephas," "But I of Christ."

In today's world, I would translate this verse as saying, “I go to such-and-such church and my church has the best Christian leaders. They are great men and they walk with God. And since you are not choosing to follow everything that my leadership teaches from the Bible, I'm going to choose to separate myself from you. Because, in my thinking, if you're not following everything that my leader is teaching then you're likely headed down the wrong path.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

For we would not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who are commending themselves. But they themselves, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves with themselves, are without understanding.

One of the things that causes division is when we choose to compare what we are doing, or what we are teaching from the Bible, to what someone else is doing or teaching from the Bible. We look at ourselves as being the standard that everyone else needs to live up to. And if we see that they fall short of our standard, we just choose to discard them. God says that when we do that, we are without understanding.

None of us are following a ministry that is so great and so perfect that we can use it as a standard from which to compare and judge other ministries by. Every ministry has flaws in it, including yours and including mine.

1 Corinthians 1:13

Has the Christ been divided up? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?

God has ordained Jesus Christ as the head of the entire church. Not the pope, not the head of any denomination. Only Jesus Christ. His authority is the only one that counts. The scriptures clearly teach that Jesus Christ is the only one head of the church.

1 Corinthians 11:3

But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God.

I was involved with a particular Christian ministry for 10 years. I got involved with them on a very deep level. I did everything they asked me to do and more. Then one day I received a phone call. It happened to be on my birthday, but they didn't know that. They asked me a question. Who was I going to follow? The designated leader of their ministry? Or a different man? Specifically, they were asking me to choose between two former leaders of their ministry that had now split and gone in opposite directions.

My answer to that question was, "Neither one. I will follow Jesus Christ and no other man." That answer was not acceptable, and I was immediately excommunicated from their church fellowships. I was no longer invited to participate in any of their church functions or use any of their materials. In their mind, there was only one person that all Christians were supposed to be taking directions from and that person was the

president that they had designated for their ministry. If you chose to follow anyone else, including Jesus Christ, you were headed down the wrong path!

1st Corinthians 11:3 tells us that the head of *every* man is Christ. When God says “every,” he means “every.” You can also look at Ephesians 4:15 and 5:23 for additional verses to clarify that God has set up and designated one leader for the church, that being Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:13

Has the Christ been divided up? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized into the name of Paul?

Has the Christ been divided up? No. Christ is a single person, with a single mind. Was Paul crucified for you? No. Jesus Christ was the one that was crucified for us, right? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? Well, he might have been the one who baptized you, but where did the cleansing for sin come from? It didn't come from Paul; it came from the blood that Jesus Christ spilled on the cross. That's where the significance is. In God's thinking, there should be no division in the body of Christ because he set up all people who are saved under the same head, that being Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4:1-2

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you were called,

2 with all humility and meekness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,

What God is asking us to do in verse 3 is to keep the unity. What we read here in verse two is the approach that we will need to follow in order to carry that out. First, we must be humble. The people being talked about in 2nd Corinthians 10:12 were comparing their ministry, which they thought was really great, to other ministries that they then put at a lower level. That isn't humble thinking, that's being proud and boastful. We need to realize that all of us would still be dead in our sins, without hope, had it not been for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. It wasn't because we were great, it was because of God's love and sending his Son that we were rescued. Let's not act like we are more deserving of God's favor than anyone else.

Next comes meekness. We are to be gentle, kind and submissive to others. Instead of trying to dominate and control other Christians to do what we

want them to do, we should keep quiet and listen to what they have to say and learn from them. We need to be open to realize that they have great and valuable lessons that they can teach us, as well as things that we can teach them. It's a mutual relationship between your ministry and other ministries. It's not one greater than the other.

After that we are told to be patient, bearing with one another in love. Perhaps you are right about a certain area scripture and they happen to have a wrong understanding of it. That could be the case. But instead of getting mad and shunning them for not having the same faith or insight into a particular subject in the Bible that you do, God asks us to be patient with them. Isn't that how a parent is to treat their children? When a child does something wrong, do you shun them and send them away? No, you have to be patient and love them as you watch them slowly grow towards adulthood. It doesn't happen overnight. Neither do Christians grow overnight in their understanding of spiritual matters.

Verse 2 gives the foundation for achieving success when it comes to unifying ourselves with other Christians. We need to be humble, meek and patient.

Ephesians 4:3

being diligent to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I want to look at the word “diligent,” the word “keep” and the phrase “of the spirit.” We will start with “diligent.” To be diligent means to be steadfast and untiring. To give a strong and contentious effort. To keep the unity requires persistence and focus. It's something that we need to take very seriously, and it cannot be accomplished without hard work. That's what this word “diligent” means.

Another important word in this verse is “keep.” It comes from the Greek word *tereo* and means “to guard and take care of.” The implication is that this unity already exists and is something that we're being asked to care of. The unity we want to see happen amongst Christians already exists spiritually. It was formed when God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and set him up as head of the church. Our job is to work to bring into fruition something that God has already created.

Finally, we have the words “of the spirit.” In order to get saved and become a member of the body of Christ, Romans 10:9 tells us that we need to confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead. Once we do that, we receive God’s gift of holy spirit inwardly. It is by way of his spirit, and its connection to the head Jesus Christ, that unity is possible for the body of Christ.

I was once taught that the only way Christians could come together in unity would be if each person studied and rightly-divided the scriptures as we are exhorted to do in 2nd Timothy chapter 2, verse 15. It would be wonderful if every Christian could study the scriptures and come to the same conclusion that all other Christians who have studied those subjects and sections of scripture came to. But honestly, when does that happen? The truth is that we are a long way from seeing that take place.

Instead of the study of scriptures bringing unity, the opposite has happened! We've chosen to split and go separate ways based on different conclusions we've come to from our study of the scriptures. Fortunately, unity is not something that man creates through the study of scriptures. It is something God already put together for us through Jesus Christ.

If agreement on scripture is not what our unity is based on, then what exactly are we to focus on in order to maintain unity amongst each other? One of the obvious things is our primary goal, which is to reach people for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Hopefully, that is something all Christians agree on.

Ephesians 4:4

There is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling,

We are to agree that there is one body that is made up of all those whom God has saved by way of Jesus Christ. There is one spirit that each person receives inwardly when they receive salvation. We all have one hope which is the anticipation of the return of Jesus Christ to gather us all home.

Ephesians 4:5

one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

There is one Lord, who is Jesus Christ. This one is huge! It eliminates all other men as our designated master. We have one lord with everyone else being underneath his direction and guidance. Jesus Christ is our master, the head of the church.

Then you have one faith. This is a translation from the Greek word *pistis*. It can be translated into “trust” or “believing.” We are to put our trust in God and not man. That's a basic truth that we all need to realize. One baptism. Our purification, our cleansing does not occur by our own works. It took place on the cross when Jesus Christ died for our sins. Once and for all, through Jesus Christ's sacrifice, we were purified. That is the baptism that we all need to agree on. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that we were not made righteous by our works.

Ephesians 4:6

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We are to acknowledge that our Father God is the God over all of creation. There are no other gods we are to love, acknowledge or serve. Only Yahweh. What we've read here in verses 4-6, these are the sticking points of unity that we need to come together on. Personally, I don't plan to separate myself from other Christians based on any other topic where we might be in disagreement. Let's focus on these basic truths and move the Word of God together, rather than separately.

With this established, let's talk about why unity among Christians is so important. A short while before Jesus would be arrested and crucified, he gave an important exhortation to his disciples.

John 13:33-35

33 Little children, I am with you only a little while longer. You will seek me, and as I said to the Jews, so I now say to you also, 'Where I go, you are not able to come.'

34 "I am giving to you a new commandment, 'Love one another.' Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you have love for one another."

Let's dwell on verse 35 for a moment. What greater goal can we have than to help those who are lost, the ones who do not know Jesus Christ as their

lord and savior, to understand who Jesus is. And yet, we fight and wrangle with each other so much that when people living in the world look on us, they don't see Jesus and his love. Instead, what they're witnessing is another example of worldly hate and discord. When we choose to fight and have division amongst ourselves as Christians, our example discourages people from coming to Christ. If we do what Jesus exhorted and choose to love one another, we set the right example and it makes it so much easier for those who do not know Christ to see his love and follow him.

I've spent over ten years coaching children in the game of basketball and soccer, which many other countries refer to as "football." My primary goal in coaching these kids was not just to win games. My heart's desire was to build a solid foundation of learning from the sport that they can continue to draw upon regardless of what profession or career they would choose to get involved with as adults.

One thing I always put great emphasis on is teamwork. As a coach, I felt a great responsibility to get every player involved in every game. I taught my players how to work together so that each one can contribute towards the success of our team. This involves recognizing the strengths of the other players. I didn't teach this because I was resolute about wanting to win games. I taught it because I knew it was a great lesson that they would need for the rest of their lives.

What I discovered is that it really works! When you have players that jell and work together as a team, they can overcome odds. I know there were games where the team we were playing against had much more talent on their team than ours. Yet we would win a lot of those games. The reason we would win is because we would draw on the strengths of every player on our team and that would result in success. Passing the ball to the open player instead of being selfish and trying to take a shot when your double-teamed. How about setting a pick in basketball so that someone can get open? Or how about everyone knowing their position on defense and doing their part so that our defense is in sync at keeping the other team from scoring?

Teamwork is vital to success in sports. It also reaps great benefits in the business world. How much more will teamwork lead to success if we as Christians will choose to work together in order to reach people in the world who do not know Jesus Christ? Honestly, I don't know how far we

can go, but I anticipate that the ceiling is extremely high if we will work together. I know absolutely that we can perform much more together than any of us could accomplish on our own. It is a basic principle in sports and the business world. And from Ephesians 4:16 we know it is how God designed the body of Christ to operate.

Personally, I am committed to working with all Christians, regardless of church or fellowship affiliation. Because Jesus Christ is Lord over every believer in the body of Christ, I believe they all deserve my respect, love and attention. How about you?

Maybe somebody in the body of Christ has hurt you. They've done something mean or evil towards you. Many of us have experienced this. Because of that, you might have no desire to work with that individual or ministry. That's a natural human response. But I want you to use that word "endeavor" that we talked about in Ephesians 4:3 to overcome that adversity.

Ephesians 4:31

Get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and angry shouting and defaming speech, along with all malice,

When we choose to remain angry with somebody because of how they have treated us in the past, that contributes towards us not being able to be effective in our ministry. It holds us back. We need to get rid of that anger. Verse 32 tells us how to get rid of it.

Ephesians 4:32

and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God has forgiven you in Christ.

The words "one another" in this verse are specifically referring to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Remember in Galatians 6:10 how it says we're to be especially good to the household of faith? Well, part of that is forgiveness and we need to especially forgive those in the household of faith. Maybe you don't think that they deserve your forgiveness. It is not the flesh in our fellow Christians that we are asked to love. It is their inner spirit that God has given them through Christ Jesus. Is it not the same spirit that God has created within you?

There will be no labels of Baptists, Methodists, Roman Catholics and Presbyterians in the new Heaven and Earth where we are eventually headed. Why not begin now to recognize the unity that God has created for us in Christ Jesus?

In Ephesians 6:12 we are told not to wrestle against flesh and blood. We're not supposed to be battling against people. Our true enemy is Satan. Let's endeavor to guard the unity that was created in us through Christ Jesus and work together to reach the lost people in this world who need to receive the same hope of Jesus Christ that we have. If we work together as a team, we will be able to accomplish so much more than if we work separately.

In the next session we will illustrate the unique talents and abilities that God has blessed every individual with, in the body of Christ. Until then, remember that God loves you and so do I.

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