



## SUCH PERFECT UNITY

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### Uniformity

Do you recall the story of David fighting the Philistine giant, Goliath? There's one part of that story encourages me.

The army of Saul was paralyzed in fear, but a young shepherd, David, was fired up!

*1 Samuel 17:31 King Saul sent for young David.*

*32 "Master," said David, "don't give up hope. I'm ready to go and fight this Philistine."*

*33 Saul answered David, "You can't go and fight this Philistine. You're too young and inexperienced—and he's been at this fighting business since before you were born."*

*34–37 David said, "I've been a shepherd, tending sheep for my father. Whenever a lion or bear came and took a lamb from the flock, I'd go after it, knock it down, and rescue the lamb. If it turned on me, I'd grab it by the throat, wring its neck, and kill it. Lion or bear, it made no difference—I killed it. And I'll do the same to this Philistine pig who is taunting the troops of the Living God. God, who delivered me from the teeth of the lion and the claws of the bear, will deliver me from this Philistine."*

*Saul said, "Go. And God help you!"*

*38–39 Then Saul outfitted David as a soldier in [his own] armor. He put his bronze helmet on his head and belted his sword on him over the armor. David tried to walk but he could hardly budge.*

*David told Saul, "I can't even move with all this stuff on me. I'm not used to this." And he took it all off.*

*40 Then David took his shepherd's staff, selected five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the pocket of his shepherd's pack, and with his sling in his hand approached Goliath.*

David had the courage of a victorious warrior (more than all of Saul's army, or the king himself), because he trusted in the presence and promise of the Living God.

But he couldn't fight in another man's armor. What fitted another soldier did not fit him. What suited another man's style of battle did not suit him.

Most armies are fitted with uniforms. The very appearance of an army in uniform is intimidating.



However, from another point of view, uniformity means “under control.” Authoritarian leaders prescribe uniformity—of appearance, or of speech, or of behavior—as a show of strength and unity.

I usually think of “uniformity” in external physical and material terms—clothing, hairstyles, automobiles, smartphone brands—but it also may address internal matters of thought, beliefs, and the expressions thereof, as people adopt the role of policing one another for “violations.”

Much of the world outside of the church looks for a status of “peace” through uniformity (forced, if necessary)—same wealth, same dwellings, same education, same opportunities. Yet, there is nothing in all nature that is everywhere the same. Variety—great variety—is natural! We observe it, everywhere. It is the artistry of God.

I’m not suggesting that what we see or experience as inequity is good or right; it simply is. Should we address it? Yes. Can we fix it? Sometimes, partly. God has an answer for universal inequity, which we’ll come to in a few moments.

Only apart from God does humanity pursue universal equity, which is a man-made ideology, rooted in pride and envy and fear.

Pride, because I want to be the top dog.

Envy, because I’m not the top dog.

Fear, because I may never be the top dog.

In order to conquer envy and fear and secure my pride, I must have compliance—and if necessary, by force.

Jesus never enforced uniformity, but He prayed for unity among His followers.

*John 17:23* **May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.**

Biblical “unity,” however, does not require “uniformity,” for God has formed and gifted each person uniquely.

## Unity

I am moved by His chosen words: “such perfect unity.” It is not a status any one of us may reach, for it is a condition of the whole Body of Christ. But it is an experience (not just an idea) that is the result of doing life together; the end of a lifelong process of giving and receiving—our shared experience.

What does Biblical unity look like? Here’s a description from Paul:

*Romans 15:5* **May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> so that with **one heart and mouth** you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

<sup>7</sup> **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.**

A “spirit of unity” is revealed as we give glory to God through Christ with “one heart and mouth.” As the psalmist prayed:

*Psalms 19:14* **May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.**

Would you make this your prayer? Heart and mouth. As in Romans 10.

*Romans 10:8 NJB* **What does [the Scripture] say, then? The word is very near to you; it is **in your mouth and in your heart**, that is, the word of faith, the faith which we preach, <sup>9</sup> that if you declare with your **mouth** that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe with your **heart** that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> It is by believing with the **heart** that you are justified, and by making the declaration with your **lips** that you are saved.**

A “spirit of unity” is a pervasive attitude. It is from the heart, and so possesses our hearts that it becomes the pattern of our speech.

A “spirit of unity” that glorifies God is demonstrated when we “accept one another” for the simple fact that Jesus Christ has accepted us.

*Romans 14:1* **Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don’t argue with them about what they think is right or wrong.**

Romans 15:7 **Accept** each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory.

## Such Unity

Jesus prayed for “*such unity*.” What else was unique about it? It was modeled on the unity enjoyed by the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—a relationship of intimate confidence.

Paul described the goal of our journey as disciples of Christ like this:

*Ephesians 4:13* This will continue until we all come to **such unity** in our faith and knowledge of God’s Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ.

“*Faith and knowledge of God’s Son.*” This, too, describes intimate confidence.

The trust we gain from knowing *about* a person is nascent compared to the trust that is anchored in intimate acquaintance. As long as you keep Jesus on the plane of head knowledge—merely gathering more and more information about Him—your confidence in Him, when tested, will waver. Only when you graduate to spending time with Him—just being in His presence, soaking in His Word—will you discover the overflowing well of trust that can rest in trying circumstances.

When we learn this together, we gain “*such unity*.”

## Such Perfect Unity

But wait! There’s more! It is not only “*such unity*” for which Jesus prayed; it is “*such perfect unity*”!

Colossians 3:12-14

*Colossians 3:12* Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.<sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues **put on love**, which binds them all together in **perfect unity**.

Paul has broken down the kind of “acceptance” we are to show toward each other: compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, making excuses for each other, and forgiving each other.

And “*over all these virtues*,” he added, “*put on love.*” Godly love is the crown of grace, binding all these good qualities together in “*perfect unity*.”

## Impact

So, where does God expect to see signs of “*such perfect unity*” in our day-to-day lives? And, where may we expect to see the fruit of “*such perfect unity*”? Three areas in particular:

**1. Faith in Christ.** Unity is founded in our common faith.

While our core doctrines, especially concerning the person of Jesus Christ, will be shared, do not think that we all must have the same beliefs about everything that may be called Christian, nor about how such beliefs are applied in life. This is not about “beliefs” so much as it is about trust—specifically, our trust in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In unity, we will all actively trust the Lord Jesus Christ and what He has done for us. No matter what our circumstances may be, no matter how our feelings complain, no matter how other people discourage us—we will rely on the greater wisdom and power of Jesus Christ.

**2. Hope in God.** Unity shows itself in our outlook for the future.

Hope is expressed in positive expectations about our future in Christ. Not just in the great “by and by,” but for the rest of the days of our lives. While Jesus promised us “trouble” in this world—including temptation and sorrow and persecution and opposition—He also promised us courage for the day and victory in the end.

In unity, we will share a positive expectation of the Holy Spirit’s activity—that He is able to work ALL things (not just some things) together for our good, to give us a future and a hope (Jeremiah 29:11).

**3. Love for our diverse and faltering brethren.** Unity shines in the way we treat one another in the Family of God.

Whether in attitude, thought, word, or deed, love is our directive, empowered by the love that Jesus has first shown us—both collectively and personally.

*1 John 4:19 We love each other because He loved us first.*

God’s love is the only experience that truly changes us in a lasting way. Our love for each other is the only path that fulfills our unity in Christ.

**Listen:** I said that God has an answer for the universal inequities of life; it is His compassionate love, expressed through His Body, the Church.

## Continuity

*1 Corinthians 13:13* **Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.**

And, the Holy Spirit reminds us that “*endurance and encouragement*” are necessary for the lifelong process that leads to unity. Please remember this, and apply them copiously every day.

*Ephesians 4:3* **Make every effort to keep yourselves *united in the Spirit*, binding yourselves together with peace.**

If you do not endure *in* faith, you cannot encourage others *to* faith, no matter how much you may talk about it.

You need *endurance* for yourself and *encouragement* for others, and these are God’s promised gifts to each of us.

*Galatians 6:9* **Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.**

*Hebrews 10:24* **Let us think of ways to *motivate one another* to acts of love and good works. <sup>25</sup> And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but *encourage one another*, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.**

*2 Corinthians 13:11* **Dear brothers and sisters, I close my letter with these last words: Be joyful. Grow to maturity. *Encourage each other*. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.**

See how His grace works in you? Don’t neglect to encourage yourself in the Lord, as David did, so that you may bring courage to others in these troubled days.