



The Gospel Unites

By Dr. John D. Morrison
Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor

 **Lakewood**
PRESS

The Gospel Unites

John D. Morrison

Copyright © 2021 John D. Morrison

Published by Lakewood Press

Lakewood Baptist Church

2235 Thompson Bridge Road Gainesville, Georgia 30501

Scripture quotations are from The ESV® Bible
(The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing
ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Design by Joy Willis



The Gospel Unites

By Dr. John D. Morrison
Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor





Letter from the Pastor

There is one biblical idea that theologians throughout the centuries have held up as a concise word from the Lord that captures his mission in the world: “I will be your God, and you shall be my people.” This promise of God is found throughout the Old Testament—in Genesis when God is establishing his covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:7); in Exodus when God is calling his people out of Egypt (Exo. 6:7); and in Ezekiel when God is assuring his promise of a covenant of peace (Eze. 34:24; 36:28). Through the prophet Jeremiah this relational promise comes to its most full vision as God affirms his promise to the house of Israel, “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33; see also Jer. 7:23; 30:22).

This promise of God is fulfilled in the New Testament as Jesus comes to reconcile God’s people to their God. In Christ the promise is accomplished, and is called the “good news.” Union with Christ, then, is a central theme of all the New Testament because to be united to Christ means a person is reconciled and united with God himself. The work is completed as God the Father sends his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners. Then the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to transform the hearts of God’s people and make the union complete. For all those who are trusting in Christ, God is now

your God and you are his child. That’s the good news!

But the message of union with Christ is even deeper, because God’s promise was to have a “people.” This people is not only united with God, but they are also united to one another as the Father’s children, through Christ, by the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God’s great and grand promise, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” is fulfilled, and all those who have faith in Jesus Christ are recipients of all the blessings that come as a child of God. Truly this is the gospel that unites.

Union with Christ is a treasure, and unity with Christians in the church through Christ is a gift. Over the next 4 weeks we’ll explore the incredible depths of this treasure and gift. Our prayer is that as you join us in looking into these great truths of God he will continue to grow you into the person he desires for you to be. Jesus Christ is the vine, you are the branches. True life is found in him.

May the Lord richly bless you as you walk with him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Smiley'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a large loop at the end.

Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor



Week 1.....	6
United with Christ	
Week 2.....	12
Union and Communion	
Week 3.....	19
United in One Body	
Week 4.....	25
Uniting All Things	



I am the *wine*;

you are the *branches*.

Whoever *abides* in me and I in him,
he it is that bears much *fruit*, for apart
from me you can do *nothing*.

JOHN 15:5

READ | Colossians 3:1-4**REFLECT**

"I am the vine," Jesus declares, "you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). Jesus pictures here a reality we learn from the earliest days of following him: we need him. Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches. Our life depends on being united to him.

This image from John 15 describes a truth known as union with Christ. Union with Christ means that God has joined us to his Son. When we hear the gospel and respond in faith, God the Father unites us to Christ Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As believers, we are one with Jesus. Christ is in us, and we are in him. Paul summarizes the reality of this union when he explains, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

We read this same truth in Colossians 3. We have been "raised with Christ" (3:1). Now, Paul tells us, "Your life is hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). As followers of Jesus our lives in him. The Father looks on us and sees his Son. We are united to him in such a way that Paul can say in the next verse, "When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (3:4). When he returns, we will be with him in glory.

This week we see in Scripture that salvation depends on being united to Christ. Our lives must be hidden in him. He must abide in us, and we in him. We will only have life as we are united to Jesus, our vine.

Read Colossians 3 again and mark every time you see the phrase "with Christ" or "with him." In this passage, what does Paul tell us comes to us "with Christ"?

If your life is hidden in Christ, how does God the Father view you? What comfort can you find from this truth?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

As you pray, thank the Father for the gift of life that he gives you by joining you to Jesus.

READ | Romans 5:12-21**REFLECT**

We can be united to Christ because he became like us. His coming to earth and taking on a complete human nature forms the basis for our union with him. We can be united to Christ Jesus because he first united his divine nature to our human nature. In him, we can become children of God because he became a man.

Romans 5 emphasizes the importance of Jesus's being fully human. Our salvation depends upon it. Since he became a man, Jesus serves as our representative, so that what is true of him becomes true of us by faith. Adam, the first man, was our original representative. Through his sin, death and sin infected all. Now, Christ has come, and through his obedience many are made righteous (5:18-19). We share in the righteousness of Jesus our representative when we are united to him by faith.

Jesus Christ represents us, and he also serves as our substitute. Paul highlights this truth earlier in Romans 5 when he proclaims, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). "For us" means that Jesus died as the substitute for his people. All who trust in him enjoy the benefits of his substitution. Even when we were God's enemies, Christ sacrificed himself as our substitute (5:10). We share in the benefits of Jesus's death when we are united to him by faith.

Reflect on Romans 5:17-19. Does your standing before God depend upon your work or Christ's?

Where do you find yourself thinking that your performance determines how God views you? How does knowing that Jesus is your representative and substitute free you from striving to try to earn God's favor?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank Jesus for coming to earth and becoming like us in order to be our representative and substitute.

READ | Romans 6:1-14

REFLECT

Through our union with Christ, we share in his death and resurrection. When we come to faith in Jesus, “we have been united with him in a death like his” (6:5). We have died to sin and to our former way of life. Baptism pictures this truth. We are lowered into the water, which symbolizes being lowered into the grave (6:3-4).

Just as we rise out of the waters of baptism, so too we will certainly share in Christ’s resurrection. “Now,” Paul encourages us, “if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (6:8). God unites us to Christ Jesus so that we share in his death and his life through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Being united to Jesus in his death and resurrection changes the way we live. We have now been set free from sin (6:7). Sin has no dominion over us (6:14). By sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection, we are now free from the power of sin and free to live to God. Sin is no longer inevitable for us. In union with Christ Jesus and by the power of the Spirit, we are free to live in a manner that honors God.

Do you believe that sin is inevitable for you? Do you feel as though there are certain temptations that will always overwhelm you?

What truths from Romans 6:1-14 encourage you that in Christ, sin no longer reigns over you?

Reflect on Romans 6:12-14. Ask the Lord to convict you about where you struggle to live out these verses. Pray for the Spirit’s help to live a life that honors God.

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank God that through the work of Jesus and by the power of the Holy Spirit sin no longer reigns over you. Pray for his strength to put sin to death by the Spirit’s work in you.

READ | 2 Corinthians 4:7-18**REFLECT**

Our union with Christ guarantees that we will share in his resurrection, but this union does not free us from hardships in life. As we share in Christ's life, we will also share in his sufferings. Paul articulates this truth as he expresses his desire "that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10-11). He longs to know Christ and share in his resurrection, but he sees that, even for the believer, the resurrection comes through the cross.

In our reading today, Paul exemplifies what it looks like to share in Jesus's sufferings. Our lives are frail. We are like clay jars, made of dust and fragile (2 Cor. 4:7). Paul understood the fragility of life well as he endured many hardships for the sake of the gospel (4:8-9; cf. 11:21-33). We endure such things for Jesus's sake as we carry in our bodies the death of Jesus (4:10). We share in his sufferings because we are united to him.

As we share in Jesus's sufferings, we also look forward to when we will share in his resurrection. We have faith that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and bring us into his presence" (4:14). We will be raised with Jesus when he returns and will forever in God's glorious presence in the new creation.

According to 2 Corinthians 4:7 and 4:11, what purpose does God have for us in hardships?

Read Hebrews 2:17-18 and 4:14-16. What comfort do you find in knowing that Jesus suffered like we do and can sympathize with us? How does such truth help you in your hardships?

Do you see in your life a tendency to believe that faith in Christ will free you from pain and suffering? Based on 2 Corinthians 4:7-18, how do you think Paul would respond to you?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Pray for yourself or others that God would give grace to endure the current hardships of life.

READ | Ephesians 1:3-14

REFLECT

God reconciles through the gospel. Through the good news of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, God reconciles sinners to himself and to one another. The gospel unites. It unites us to God and to one another. Such uniting, such reconciliation happens through our union with Christ.

Our entire salvation depends on our being united with Jesus. Paul declares in his letter to the church at Ephesus that it is only "in Christ" that the Father blesses us with every blessing of the Spirit (1:3). Every blessing of from the Father comes to us in Christ. John Murray, a Scottish theologian, avers, "Nothing is more central or basic than union and communion with Christ. . . . It is the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation." We are saved by virtue of our being found in Jesus Christ.

The blessing of God's redeeming work comes to us as the Father unites us to his Son by the Holy Spirit. In this first chapter of Ephesians, Paul works through the progression of God's redeeming work in our lives to highlight that every aspect of our salvation happens in Christ. Our whole salvation hinges on our union with Christ. Jesus is our life, and we will only experience his true life as we are united to him.

Review Ephesians 1 and list all that God does for us in Christ.

According to Ephesians 1:13-14, how do we come to be united with Christ?

How is it a great source of comfort and assurance that salvation only comes to us as we are united to Jesus Christ? How can you rest in this truth of the gospel?

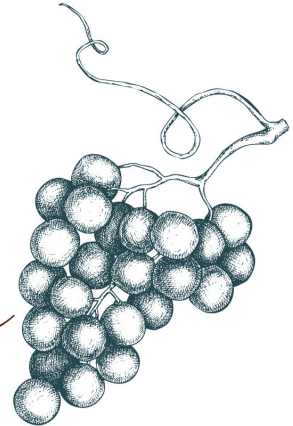
MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank the Father that your salvation does not depend on your work but on the work of Christ. Thank the Holy Spirit for uniting you to Christ Jesus and sealing you in him.

Union and Communion



I am the *wine*;
you are the *branches*.

Whoever *abides* in me and I in him,
he it is that bears much *fruit*, for apart
from me you can do *nothing*.

JOHN 15:5

READ | John 13

REFLECT

The goal of our salvation is life with God. Our hope is that we will share in his life, having genuine fellowship with him. As Jesus prays to the Father, “This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (Jn 17:3). We have everlasting life when we share in the life of God and have communion with him. As he is about to be betrayed and crucified, Jesus instructs the disciples in the Upper Room, and through these chapters in John, we come to see that our communion with God comes through our union with Christ.

At the end of his teaching in the Upper Room, Jesus prays for those who follow him, and as he prays, he explains that what he makes possible through his life, death, and resurrection is nothing short of sharing in the life of our triune God. He asks the Father,

That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me (17:21-23).

We come to share in the unity that the Father and Son have in the Spirit because the Father loves us just as he loves his Son. From eternity past, the Father has loved his Son in the Spirit with a perfect, unbreakable love, and now Jesus tells us that as we are united to him, the Father loves us in that same way. We share in the steadfast love of the Lord that endures forever because we are united to Christ.

Knowing that we have received such love illuminates Christ’s new command to love one another in John 13:31-35. We can love like this because we are united to the God who is and always will be love (1 Jn 4:16). As John teaches, “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19).

According to John 13:34, with what kind of love are you called to love your fellow followers of Jesus?

As Jesus explains it in John 13:35, what does our love for one another demonstrate to the world?

Who can you love and how can you love them in a way that demonstrates the transforming power of the gospel to the world?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

*Father, thank you for lavishing your love upon me,
so that in Christ and by your Spirit I would enjoy life in you. Amen.*

READ | John 14**REFLECT**

Jesus is the way to share in the life and love of God. As he declares to the disciples, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). Communion with God comes through union with Christ.

Jesus is the way to the Father because he is one with the Father. When Philip asks to see the Father, Jesus responds, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” (14:9-10). Jesus is in the Father, and the Father is in him. They share a oneness and unity that cannot be broken, and yet the Son remains distinctly the Son, and the Father is distinctly the Father. It is the intimacy and the bond they share as our one God that enables Jesus to be the way to the Father.

When Jesus makes the way to the Father, he brings us into the same loving relationship that they have always shared. We are not just invited over for a divine dinner party; we are adopted as children of God so that we experience the same love of the heavenly Father that Jesus does. Hear how Jesus describes this reality to his disciples: “In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you” (14:20). As we come to Jesus in faith, we come to share in the life and the love that the Father and Son have shared in the Spirit from eternity past.

If the Father, Son, and Spirit have always loved one another, has there ever been a time when God has not been love? Why is this such good news for us?

What do you consider your greatest challenge right now? What comfort do you find in the truth that the Father loves all those in Jesus as much as he loves Jesus?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank the Father that in Christ, he loves you as much as he loves Jesus.

READ | John 15**REFLECT**

Through his “I am” statement in John 15, Jesus provides a picture of what it means to be united to him: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5). He is the vine, and we share in his life when we are joined to him. Our fruitfulness as his followers and our enjoying true life all depend on our being united to Jesus.

We know from elsewhere in Scripture that the Spirit joins us to Christ when we believe the gospel (Eph 1:13). Here in John 15, Jesus remind us that, not just the start, but the whole of the Christian life must happen in him. As those who have been united to Jesus, we are called to continue to abide in him. We must rest and remain in him him.

Jesus teaches us to abide in him through his Word (Jn 15:7) and by obeying his commands (15:10). The life of the vine, flows to us, his branches, through his Word. Jesus speaks “the words of eternal life” (6:68). To abide in him, we need to hear, read, sing, and meditate upon his Word to us in Scripture. If we are connected to the vine, we will bear fruit (15:4). We will keep his commandments (14:15; 15:10), and in light of the surrounding context, this particularly means that we as Christians will obey his command to love one another just as he has loved us (13:34).

What does Jesus mean that we are to abide in him? How do we do that?

If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches who is the source of our obedience and good works?

As followers of Jesus who have been united with Christ, how do we continue to abide with Jesus? Consider John 8:31.

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank Jesus that through his life and work we can have life in him.
Pray for his grace to continue to abide in him.

READ | John 16**REFLECT**

It is through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are united to Christ and have communion with God. The Spirit applies the redemption that Jesus won to our lives. We share in union and communion with God through the work of the Holy Spirit.

In John 14:23, Jesus describes the blessing that comes to those who follow him, “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” Just a few verses later he explains how this will happen: the Father will send his Holy Spirit in Jesus’s name (14:26).

By the Spirit, the Father loves us as he loves the Son. Paul explains, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). God’s love comes into our lives through the Spirit, and it is through the Spirit that we can call out to God as Father (Gal 4:6). By the Spirit, we become a dwelling place for God (Eph 2:22) and so are “filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:21). In short, through the Spirit we experience the love of God, the benefits of divine adoption, and being filled with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thus, Jesus teaches his disciples on the night that he was betrayed, “Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you” (Jn 16:7). When the Spirit comes, he convicts the world (16:8-9), guides into all truth (16:13), works in us to glorify Jesus (16:14), and ultimately turns our sorrow into joy as we share in the life of God (16:20).

What comes to mind when you think of the work of the Holy Spirit? How does this compare with the work of the Spirit as Jesus describes it in our reading today?

What aspects of the Spirit’s work do you sense your need for today? Consider taking time to ask him for his help.

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

As you pray, thank God the Father that he has not left us alone but has sent us the Holy Spirit in Jesus’s name to dwell with us.

READ | John 17**REFLECT**

In his recounting of the life of Jesus, John repeatedly draws attention to the unity of God the Father and God the Son. Jesus is one with the Father. Now in the Upper Room, Jesus promises his disciples that all who follow him share in the unity and love of our triune God. The extravagance of the salvation that Jesus offers comes into view as he closes his high priestly prayer. First, Jesus prays for us to share in the unity that he has with the Father: “Just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (Jn 17:21). Jesus asks that we would share in the unbreakable fellowship that the Father and Son have shared in the Spirit from eternity past. Second, as Jesus prays, he draws attention to how the Father loves his people just as he has loved his Son (17:23). He says that we have been brought into the love that he and the Father always have had in the Spirit. There has never been a moment when this love did not exist.

Christ Jesus makes the way for us to share in the unity and love of God through our union with him. He offers us such salvation not only for our good but also for the good of others. Consider how Jesus describes one of the Father’s goal in redeeming his people: “So that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (17:23). This love and unity that God’s people share in is meant to display God’s grace to the world in order to draw others to him.

In light of Jesus’s prayer in John 17:20-26, how should we understand the way Jesus describes eternal life in 17:3? What does it mean to know God? How do we come to know him?

The goal of our salvation is being with God and enjoying the life and fellowship of the Trinity. What does it look like to enjoy God now in this life?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Father, thank you that in your marvelous grace you enable us to share in the unity of you, your Son, and your Spirit. May you bless us as your people to live out this unity in your church. Amen.



United in One Body

I am the *vine*;
you are the *branches*.
Whoever *abides* in me and I in him,
he it is that bears much *fruit*, for apart
from me you can do *nothing*.

JOHN 15:5

READ | Romans 12:1-8**REFLECT**

When we are united to Christ, we become united to one another in his body. The gospel reconciles us to God and to our fellow believers. As Paul explains, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). In Jesus Christ, we are united as one.

Unity, however, does not mean uniformity. We remain “many members.” We continue to be who God created us to be with our different backgrounds and abilities. God, in fact, gifts each member of the church differently for his glory and for our good. Paul instructs us, “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them” (12:6). As a human body is made up of many different parts and each part is needed, so too, the body of Christ is made up of many members, each of whom is needed for the good the church and the advancement of the gospel.

Romans 12 marks the turn in this letter from the instruction on what to believe to the exhortation on how Christians should live out those beliefs. As Paul begins to discuss Christian living, he quickly turns to life in the church. I would suggest that verses 1-3 in chapter 12 can only be lived out through the body of Christ that Paul describes in verses 4-8. Paul begins this section by addressing the “you all” of the church. The “you” in 12:1 is plural, and then he notes that it is to the “brothers and sisters” of the church. He calls on the church to present their “bodies as a living sacrifice.” Notice, it is our bodies, plural, that he calls on us to present as a single sacrifice. It is as the church that we, who are many, can be one sacrifice, “holy and acceptable to God.” We need the body of Christ, the church, to follow Jesus well in our daily lives. When we come to Jesus in faith and are united to him, we are also united to his body, the church.

How have you experienced the blessing of being part of the body of Christ? If you have not, what steps do you need to take to commit to a local church to help you grow in your life with Christ?

Read Matthew 25:14-30. What is Jesus’s expectation for those to whom gifts are given?

How has God gifted you to serve in the body of Christ? How are you using those gifts?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5**PRAY**

As you pray, thank God the Father that he has not left us alone but has sent us the Holy Spirit in Jesus’s name to dwell with us.

READ | Ephesians 1:22-23

REFLECT

Christ is the head of the church (Eph 1:22). His church belongs to him, for he redeemed his people with his own blood (Rev 5:9). Now, he rules and reigns over his church, exercising his authority through his Word and by his Spirit. The church belongs to Jesus Christ.

United to Christ, we as his church are his body (Eph 1:23). As his body, we are “the fullness of him” in this world. By declaring his gospel with our mouths and displaying his gospel with our lives, we serve as the hands and feet of Jesus in this world to make him known. The fullness of the church includes people from “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9), and Paul tells us that even in this age the church bears witness to this fullness by uniting people in Christ across every conceivable human division: social, economic, ethnic, political, and national. This unity only comes in and through Jesus. “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace” (Eph 2:14-15).

Through the gospel, people from all backgrounds come together as “members of the same body and partakers of the promise of Christ Jesus” (3:6), and one reason this happens is “so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (3:10). God displays his glorious wisdom through the unlikely coming together of his people in Christ’s body, the church. Likewise, Jesus tells us that it is by our surprising love for one another that people will know we are his disciples (Jn 13:35). Jesus Christ is the head of his church, and in him, we as his people are united in one body across every conceivable barrier. Through this miraculous work of God, Christ is exalted to the glory of the Father.

What would it look like this week for you to live in the reality that Christ is the head, not only of the whole church, but also of your life? Where are you resisting the blessing of his rule in your life?

What specific step can you take this week to love the people of your church well?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

PRAY

*Jesus, thank you that you loved your church so much that you gave yourself up for us.
Thank you that as our head you graciously rule and care for us. Amen.*

READ | Ephesians 4:1-16

REFLECT

United in Christ, the church is one body made up of many people with many different gifts. The many members with their God-given gifts all work toward the same goal: maturity in Christ.

Paul begins the chapter by emphasizing the unity of the church. Such unity comes from the nature of God and the gospel (Eph 4:4-6). As the people of God, the church works by his grace to maintain this unity by living “with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love” (4:2). Indeed, Paul calls on us to be eager to maintain this unity that the Spirit has established by uniting us to Christ (4:3).

Unity does not mean that each member of the body is identical. Rather, God in Christ bestows different gifts on his people (4:7), and calls some of his people to serve in distinct offices in his church (4:11). The goal of these different gifts and callings is the good of the church. God works through these different people and their gifts to build the church “to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (4:13). Maturity comes when “each part is working properly,” and then the church grows as “it builds itself up in love” (4:16).

In Ephesians 4:1-6, why does Paul say we should be united as one people in Christ? How are you working “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the body of peace” in your church (4:3)?

Reflect on Ephesians 4:15-16. How has God gifted you? How will you use that gift this week to help the body of Christ grow up in love?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank God for his grace in giving the church the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

READ | Colossians 1:15-29**REFLECT**

In Colossians 1, Paul again emphasizes that Christ is the head of his body, the church (1:18). This image reminds us that Jesus has authority over his church and that by faith we are united to him and to one another. Jesus is the head of the church because “by the blood of his cross” he is reconciling us to God (1:20). We were alienated from God and hostile to him, but through the death of Jesus, we have been reconciled to God so that Christ can present us “holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (1:21-22). The call to us as members of the body is to remain steadfast in our faith, to keep trusting in Christ (1:23).

The truth of Jesus’s work on behalf of his church leads Paul to give his own life in service to the people of God. Paul rejoices that he is able to suffer for the sake of the body of Christ (1:24). He serves the church making “the word of God fully known” (1:25). Paul proclaims the gospel among the Gentiles so that they too may share in the gospel and experience “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (1:27). Paul serves the body of Christ by proclaiming Jesus to them and by teaching them the wisdom of God, so that all may come to know Jesus and grow to maturity in him (1:28).

Paul’s goal is to “present everyone mature in Christ” (1:28). Toward this end he physically suffers for the church (1:24). “For this,” Paul declares, “I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me”(1:29). He toils and suffers through the power of Christ in him to make Jesus known and to grow the church to maturity.

As you reflect on the example of Paul, consider how God is calling on you to toil and perhaps even suffer and struggle for the good of his church?

What is one specific way you will work for the good of Christ’s body this coming week?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

As you pray, ask God to help you see where you should serve in his church.

READ | 1 Corinthians 12**REFLECT**

As Paul teaches on spiritual gifts, he emphasizes that such gifts are given for the good of the church: “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7). Spiritual gifts are not given to entertain or to impress; rather, God grants them to edify and to equip the church.

While God gives a variety of spiritual gifts, the church remains one because our God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is one (12:4-6). We share in the unity of our God and so become united to one another because we are united to Christ. All who trust in Jesus are united in his body, the church. Paul explains, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (12:13). By the Spirit, we are united in Christ.

Paul draws upon this idea of the church as to the body of Christ to highlight our unity in spite of our differences and to demonstrate our need for one another. No matter our backgrounds (12:13) and no matter our gifts (12:4), we are all united in Christ. Indeed, these differences are necessary for us to function as a healthy body. We need each other in our differences to be the body of Christ. Just as a human body would not be a body if it were only an ear, so too the body of Christ requires a variety of members to be healthy and fully functioning. When we are working together as we should in the church, we show honor to all (12:22), and we are so united that “if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together” (12:26). Ultimately our unity in the body of Christ is displayed in our radical love for one another as Paul expounds upon in 1 Corinthians 13.

How has God gifted you to serve in his church? What will you do this coming week to serve the body of Christ?

What challenges do you face in being united to people different than you? Where is the Lord helping you see your need for the whole body? How can you grow in your love for the church?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5**PRAY**

Ask the Spirit to reveal to you how you might be seeking to use the gifts he has given you to bring honor to yourself. Repent of such sin and pray for forgiveness.

Ask for God’s grace to use your gifts for the good of the body.



Uniting all things

I am the *wine*;
you are the *branches*.

Whoever *abides* in me and I in him,
he it is that bears much *fruit*, for apart
from me you can do *nothing*.

JOHN 15:5

READ | Genesis 3**REFLECT**

Over the last three weeks, we have seen in Scripture how our salvation happens in union with Christ. When we trust in Christ, God works by his Spirit to unite us to Christ so that all the blessings of redemption come to us as we are united to the Son. In our final week, we now turn to see that not just our redemption but the redemption of all of creation happens in Christ. God is bringing about his “plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph 1:10).

The beginning of Genesis reminds us that God cares about his creation. He is the one who created all things (Gen 1:1). Six times in the first chapter, God declares the world he created “good,” and then the seventh time he calls it “very good” after the creation of Adam and Eve (1:31). Father, Son, and Spirit created this world as good, and our God created it as the place where he would dwell with his people. In the garden where he placed our first parents, God spoke to them (2:15-17) and walked with them (3:8).

When Adam fell into sin, his disobedience brought sin and death to all people (Rom 5:12-21). From that point forward, all humanity inherited a corrupted nature that shared in Adam’s guilt and his desire to sin against God. Sin did not only affect all of humanity but also all of creation. Through human sin, the creation itself was cursed and death entered the world (Gen 3:17-19).

Even in the punishment God metes out for sin, he offers hope. To the serpent he warns, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). Here we read the first promise of Jesus Christ. He will come one day, born of a woman, to crush God’s enemy and to make all things new.

Read Psalm 19 and consider what creation reveals to us about God.

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank God for the blessing of living in this world he created.

READ | Romans 8:18-25

REFLECT

Creation itself has been corrupted by sin. Humans were given the responsibility to rule and to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28-30), and when Adam and Eve sinned, their disobedience infected the whole creation (Gen 3:17-19). In Romans 8, Paul describes how creation now eagerly waits for the reversal of this curse.

The future of all of creation is intimately tied up with the future of humanity because God intended for us to steward his creation on his behalf. Now, creation waits with us for the return of Christ and the restoration of all things. When Christ returns and our redemption is complete, all of creation will be made new.

Notice that this future hope for which we wait with patience includes “the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Our future hope of life forever in God’s presence is that we will live with him in our glorified bodies in the new creation, just as Adam and Eve walked with him in the Garden.

The psalmist declares, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein” (Ps 24:1). Christ redeems the fullness of creation, including our bodies and this physical world. All will be made new.

How does Paul describe the state that creation is currently in?

How and when will creation be set free?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Pray Psalm 24:1-2, thanking God for his creation and his authority over it.

READ | Isaiah 65:17-25

REFLECT

Even before the coming of Christ, God granted Isaiah a vision of what would one day be when Christ returned a second time. The Lord declares through Isaiah, “Behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17). The present tense of the verb create emphasizes the sureness of this prophecy. God will bring it to fruition. This promised hope is for all of creation. It is the promise of a new heavens and a new earth.

This new creation will be marked by gladness and joy (65:18-19). In verse 20, Isaiah can barely find words to describe everlasting life with God’s presence, and so he speaks of how it would be tragic in that day if someone only lived a hundred years. He cannot conceive of language lofty enough to describe this time. He envisions a life of blessing and abundance (65:21-22).

Most importantly, this new creation will be a place where God is with his people. “Before they call,” the Lord announces, “I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (65:24). God will be so near that he hears our prayers even before we can give voice to them. He answers our prayers before we are done speaking them. His presence means that there will be peace, not only among his people but even between all of creation (65:25).

What hope do you find in knowing that God is one day going to create a new earth where he will dwell with his people?

How are we able to enjoy God’s presence even now as we wait to experience the fullness of his glorious presence in the new creation?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank God that he has had a plan to redeem this world since before its foundation.

READ | Revelation 21**REFLECT**

Like Isaiah, John has a vision of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). This new creation is the new Jerusalem where God dwells with his people (21:2-3). Under the Mosaic covenant, God came to dwell amongst his people in one particular area of the temple in Jerusalem, but now, the whole of the earth will be filled with God’s glorious presence. The presence of God with his people will bring an end to all mourning and will usher in an everlasting joy (21:4). As the Lord himself declares, “Behold, I am making all things new” (21:5).

This city, which is the new creation, has no temple, “for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (21:22). The whole earth has become a new and better Eden—a garden temple for the Lord. Just as Habakkuk prophesied, “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). This is the hope for all of creation and for all nations (Rev 21:26). People from “every tribe and language and people and nation” will worship our God, proclaiming, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” (5:9, 13). All “who are written in the Lamb’s book of life,” will gather in this new creation to worship our God and King (21:27).

How should the reality that God cares for the creation and is making all things new affect the way we live in this world now?

The end time vision that Jesus gave John included people from all nations enjoying life in the new creation. What role are we as God’s people called to play now in order to be a part in many people finding their names in the Lamb’s book of life?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Thank God that in Christ he is making all things new.

READ | Ephesians 1:9-10**REFLECT**

From Genesis to Revelation, we have caught a glimpse this week of God's care for creation and his plan to make all things new. God's plan for his people and for this whole world comes to fruition in Jesus Christ. As Paul unfolds God's redemptive plan, he describes how God made "known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:9–10).

The Father's plan is to unite all things in the Son. God will sum up all of creation, things in heaven and things on earth, in Christ Jesus. As with all of our salvation, this final act of God to redeem the world happens in Christ. The story of Scripture demonstrates how sin has disrupted the unity and harmony of this world. Sin has infected all of creation, but God's plan is that in Jesus Christ, all of creation will be reconciled to itself and to God.

God placed Adam in the garden to rule and subdue the earth, but where Adam failed, the new and better Adam, Jesus Christ, has come as the head over all of creation. By his coming as fully human, his righteous life, his atoning death, and his glorious resurrection, Jesus redeemed for God a people for his own possession and also prepared the way for his ushering in the new creation. We wait with patient longing for when Christ returns and all things are united and reconciled in him.

How does remembering our future hope fuel faithfulness in our every day lives?

In the middle of life's demands, what steps can you take to keep our future hope in Christ at the forefront of your thoughts?

MEMORIZE & MEDITATE | John 15:5

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.

PRAY

Father, thank you for your love and grace, for you established your plan of redemption before the foundation of this world and now are bringing it to fruition in Christ Jesus and by your Spirit. May you together with your Son and Spirit be forever praised, for you are the God who saves. Amen.



I am the *wine*;
you are the *branches*.

Whoever *abides* in me and I in him, he it is
that bears much *fruit*, for apart from me you
can do *nothing*.

JOHN 15:5

Our life depends on being united to Jesus. In fact, our entire salvation depends upon union with Christ. Through this study, we will see how we are united to Christ Jesus through the gospel and enjoy this union now and look forward to its completion in the new creation.



Dr. Tyler Smiley, Senior Pastor • Lakewoodlife.org
2235 Thompson Bridge Road, Gainesville, GA 30501 • (770) 532-6307