

# Sent by God: His People on His Mission

## **LESSON 9: Values--Unity**

#### **Our Values**

Last week, we introduced six values that guide this church and give us identity. These values reflect our mission and shape us as a church. Here is brief review and summary.

**Truth**. We value truth, we value <u>biblical teaching</u>. This commitment calls us to be *approved workers*.

**Unity**. We value unity, we seek <u>peaceful harmony</u>. We seek unity in God's Spirit as spiritual brothers.

**Touch**. God's presence touches, loves and cares. God touches our world through us, his *ambassadors*. We value caring evangelism.

**Christian Living**. To <u>live like Jesus</u> acknowledges that he calls us to be like him, his *disciples*.

**Love**. Our desire to <u>love like Jesus</u> shows in all our relationships, but especially in our commitment to be the *family of God*.

**Ministry**. We want to equip and empower one another, recognizing that all are called to be *servants*.

## **Truth and Unity**

Last week we noted that two great pillars of the restoration plea are truth and unity. These exist in a tension that often lessens one as the other increases. As a result, many today have given up on one or the other of these foundational values.

These tensions must be discussed by any church committed to being a church for all people. What is the source of genuine unity? What does it mean to be committed to truth?

This week our focus is on unity and God's desire for peace, harmony, and forgiveness among his people.

#### Unity

Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is probably best known for his desire for the unity of his followers. In this prayer, Jesus also acknowledged that the word of God is truth (John 17:17). This prayer connects the concepts of truth and unity.

Jesus prayer for the unity of believers (17:21) has two results (vv. 21-24). First, the world believes in Jesus as the one sent from God because of the unity of his followers. Second, the world knows the love of God through the complete unity of believers. In the midst of churches that sometimes seek to evangelize the world by preaching the truth 'harder and harder', what do these verses say about how the world knows God's love and Jesus as the demonstration of that love?

Paul's emphasis on unity in Ephesians 4:3 is immediately followed by the 'seven ones'. Are these seven basic concepts sufficient to unite true believers? Can you accept as a brother a person who acknowledges all of these?

Paul goes on to describe the goal as reaching unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and becoming mature (v. 13). How does unity in the faith different from unity in the knowledge of the Son of God?

Paul concludes this section by noting that our unity depends upon the harmony of the body as it works together according to the plan of God, reaching maturity in Christ (vv. 12-16). This kind of unity keeps the body strong—less likely to be tossed back and forth by the influences around it. The value of being spiritual brothers in the Lord shows in our shared lives and in our individual Christian lives.

One connection between unity and truth is that unity keeps us stronger in truth. It may be true that truth unites us, but the Bible makes just as strong a case for the opposite: that unity enhances and is evidence of our commitment to truth.

### **Discussion Questions**

Note: Discussing shared values, or understandings of those values, is never an easy thing. Seek God's guidance in prayer, seek his wisdom and seek his unifying Spirit as the class works through these discussion questions.

A brief review: What does it mean to say that we value something? How would you define a value?

Read John 17:13-26. How many references to truth and unity can you find in this section? What are some of the connections between truth and unity? What is the value of truth? What is the value of unity? What impact do they have on whom, that is, who is changed by truth? Who is changed by unity?

In your opinion, has the church ever chosen truth over unity? When? Give specific examples if possible. In your opinion, has the church ever chosen unity over truth? When? Give specific examples. In your opinion, what is an appropriate balance between these two values?

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. Why (or why not) are the 'seven ones' a sufficient statement of faith for you? What would you add as absolutely essential?

What is the difference between knowing the Bible and knowing Christ?

Which of the following is most accurate concerning your life: "I know Christ", or "I know about Christ"? What keeps us from being tossed back and forth by doctrinal questions and cunning teachings: unity in the faith, or unity in the knowledge of the Son of God? If both are important, which have we emphasized the most? Is there any chance that some of our youth have wandered from "the faith" because we failed to emphasize getting to know Christ?

Is there any value in speaking truth if it is not spoken in love?

Can the church really be united if the individual members are not equipped and encouraged to do their part and to be involved in the functioning of the body?

What are the characteristics of peace and harmony in a church? What are the characteristics of a church united? Does a united church always agree on everything? Biblical unity leads to genuine brotherhood. What does it mean to be spiritual brothers and sisters? Can we experience genuine spiritual unity with someone who is not a brother or sister? Why or why not?

How do truth and unity work together in the contemporary church to help us reach God's purpose of bringing the world to faith in Jesus?

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