***Bible Expressions of Unity***

Today I want to discuss with you the subject of **Bible Expressions of Unity**. You know, God has always expected His people to be united. It's been said, "United we stand, divided we fall" and I believe that's true. Unity within the body of Christ is a necessity because it fosters a positive atmosphere within the congregation which is conducive to church growth. Because of this we all need to gain a deeper appreciation and a proper understanding of the subject of unity. As the basis for our study I’d like to read from Psalm 133:1 where the psalmist said this: **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”** I don’t think anyone here would argue with the idea that unity is a pleasant thing. The Bible teaches that God expects His people to dwell together in unity. He expects us to be united, not divided. So for the next few minutes I’d like to share with you some different expressions the Bible uses to talk about unity. And I urge you to jot them down, take them home with you, and study for yourself, whether these things be so.

**(1) Stand-Fast In One Spirit:** First of all, the Bible teaches that we need to stand fast in one spirit and one mind. God expects all of us to have the same mind about Biblical teaching. Did you know that? When Paul wrote the Philippians he said in Philippians 1:27, **“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”** What a statement! Would to God that everyone of us had the same spirit and the same mind when it comes to religious matters. Wouldn’t that be great?! Wouldn’t it be nice if the world understood that concept of things? What do you think that would do to the denominational world if we had that thought and that practice? It would be swept away overnight! So hopefully from that statement you can appreciate the power and the importance of Bible unity.

**(2) Be Like-Minded:** But again, another expression the Bible uses to talk about unity is the phrase like-minded. Paul, writing the Philippians in chapter 2 and verse 2, said, **“Fulfil ye my joy** (Let me ask you Paul, what was your joy?)**, that ye be likeminded** (That means to have the same kind of thinking)**, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.”** In other words, we must not be double minded when it comes to spiritual matters. James said in his writings, **“A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”** (Jas. 1:8) A congregation filled with members who have different ways of thinking will have a tendency to create an atmosphere of strife and division. That’s why God’s book tells us to be like-minded so that the church might prosper, grow, and become strong. In order for the church to prosper and grow we need people who have like-minds. To be like-minded means we’re all on the same page. By the way, life is a lot easier when we’re all on the same page, isn’t it? Brethren dwelling together in peace is hard to find these days. However, the Psalmist said in Psalm 133:1, **“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!”** The Bible teaches us to be like minded. The prophet recognized this vital concept when he asked this simple yet profound question, **“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”** (Amos 3:3) But there’s another expression of unity that the Bible uses…

**(3) Be of the Same-Mind:** Number three, this time I take you to Philippians 4:2 where the apostle Paul had this to say: **“I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.”** By the way, this is the only thing negative that was ever said about the church in Philippi. Think about that for a minute. Apparently these two ladies didn’t always see eye to eye and that’s why the apostle admonishes them to be of the same mind. You know, there must not be a different mindset among us if this church is going to grow and prosper and be strong. It’s recorded in the book of Nehemiah 8:1, “**And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate.”** That statement “one man” indicates that they were united and the Lord expects that of us even today. But again, **Bible Expressions of Unity**…

 **(4) Be Perfectly Joined Together:** Number four, there’s another expression the Bible uses to talk about unity and it comes from 1 Corinthians 1:10. One of the problems at the church at Corinth was that they were divided. They were divided over whose name to wear. Some were saying, “I am of Paul,” or “I am of Cephas,” or “I am of Christ.” For example, had the apostle Paul baptized an individual they thought that they ought to wear his name and he reprimanded them for that. Then he made this statement: **“Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.”** Think about that. He said to be of the same mind when it comes to religious matters and when it comes to matters of judgment we need to be on the same page. After all, we all read the same book, don’t we? You see, we’ve got to be that way if we expect the church to grow and be strong. In the New Testament, the concept of unity primarily concerns the relationship of the members of a local church one with another. Unity on any other level or upon any other basis other than the truth of God's word does not conform to heaven's will (Common examples would include the "unity in diversity" movement; the philosophy of "just attend the church of your choice and we'll walk along together;" or "we're all headed to the same place just taking different paths;" etc). By the way, just agreeing to disagree is not real unity! Unity in the congregational relationship is an individual obligation and grows out of the very nature of God's plan for fellowship among Christians in the church as a body. In New Testament scriptures this local relationship is emphasized in many passages and all of them point up the requirement of that attitude toward one another that brings about and preserves unity. And so I admonish all of us (beginning with myself) that we be of the same mind and of the same judgment that there be no divisions among us. In 1 Peter 3:8 Peter likewise charged those to whom he was writing by saying, **“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.”** You just can’t get away from that expression, can you – be of the same mind. You just might underscore that phrase in your Bible. But there’s another one I want to mention to you…

**(5) Endeavoring To Keep the Unity of the Spirit:** In Ephesians chapter 4 Paul uses some colorful language to talk about the unity that God expects among His people. Let’s begin reading in verse 1: **“1I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”** (Eph. 4:1-3) In other words, he said we need to work at having unity among us – or endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace as he puts it. By the way, it takes hard work and effort in order to preserve unity among us. And when the Bible talks about how there is only one of something, do you know what that suggests to you? We must be united! We can’t be "two" in regards to Bible teaching – we have to be of the same mind. In verses 4-6 of that same chapter the apostle lists 7 one’s which are an expression of Bible unity. Listen to it: **“4There is one body** (Now the question gets to be what is the one body? Well, the Bible defines it in Colossians 1:24 which says, *“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church.”*  How many churches does the Bible talk about? One, two, a hundred, a thousand? No, just one! So whenever somebody says to attend the church of your choice just remember this verse. There is only one church and that’s the church of Jesus Christ, the Son of God! And that’s the church he’s talking about when he says, *“There is one body…”*) **, and one Spirit** (That’s the Holy Spirit – a member of the Godhead. There are three persons who make up the Godhead – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit)**, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling** (There is only one hope of the Lord’s people. Do you know what that is? Heaven itself. That’s the goal to which we work even today. Paul said in Colossians 1:5, *“For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.”*)**; 5One Lord** (That’s the Lord Jesus Christ)**, one faith** (By the way, the word ‘faith’ as used in the Bible sometimes means to believe in…but that’s not the meaning here. Here he’s referring to the gospel system by which we are justified. That’s the faith that Paul preached in Galatians 1:23 which he later on calls the gospel. So the faith and the gospel are one in the same. But how many are there? Just one! And if we’re on the same page, if we intend to be united, we have to come to the conclusion that there is but one faith)**, one baptism** (You know, the Bible talks about 6 different baptisms – 4 in the past, 1 in the future, and 1 in the present. So when Paul wrote Ephesians 4:5 there was only one baptism that was in force which is the one Jesus commanded when He said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”* It’s the baptism of Acts 2:38 when those on the Day of Pentecost were told to, *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”* It’s the baptism that washes away our sins (Acts 22:16), that puts us into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:3-4), and adds us to His body according to Galatians 3:27, and on and on it goes. And so when Paul wrote Ephesians chapter 4 and talked about the unity to which we need to endeavor he said there is one baptism!)**, 6One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”** Is that too hard to understand? I don’t think so. In the New Testament fellow members of the body of Christ are said to be "builded together," "knitted together in love," "members one of another" and all of these expressions emphasize the kind of relationship that Christians must maintain in the fellowship of the local church. Let me give you a few more scriptures to go along with that: Ephesians 2:19-22 says this: **"19Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; 21In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."** In Colossians 2 Paul said again, **"1For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; 2That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ."** Romans 12:5 reads as following: **"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."** By the way, when any member takes such an attitude toward himself and his fellow members that creates a "schism 'in the body" and disturbs its harmony and peace, he has committed a crime against God and the temple of God and against his brethren. In 1 Corinthians 12:25 Paul expresses God's desire for His church: **"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."** By the way, you can’t read these passages and not understand that these are all Bible expressions of unity. I'd like to read you an excerpt from an article written by brother Roy Cogdill:

"Our liberal-minded brethren tell us that their brotherhood federations such as Herald of Truth, their human benevolent societies (so-called Orphan Homes and Old Folk's Homes), and their human societies for edification such as Pepperdine College are merely "methods," matters of human judgment, and that they belong in the realm of expedience. But if these brethren are right in claiming that they are matters of expedience, what right do they have to think so highly of their "judgment" that they thrust them into the local church and demand that those who believe they are violations of the Faith of the Gospel, and whose consciences will not allow them to participate in such acquiesce in supporting them or be castigated, exorcised, and mistreated in every conceivable sort of way.

They promote their humanly devised "idols" from the pulpit and through their bulletins and other mediums but deny the voice of opposition the right to any expression in either. Sometimes we witness incidents of such extreme treatment against the best of former friends, the closest of fleshly relationships, and those formerly most beloved of their brethren. This is even sometimes the case when the actual support of such human arrangements has not been begun by 'the congregation but where there is only a difference in attitude and conviction concerning them.

Such incidents, and there are many of them, evidence a lack of such attitudes as are set forth in the passages cited herein above, viz., "lowliness of mind," "meekness," "longsuffering," and "forebearing one another in love." It appears that if such "methods" and "expediencies" are not essential and are properly regarded as human expediencies and if those who judge them to be permissible have any regard for the "Unity of the Spirit" or recognize any obligation to "Keep the bond of peace" in the local church or have any love and regard for brethren and interest in their souls, they would not assume the attitude of "Lords." not even if they are elders, by demanding that in order to have peace in the church everyone must bow down to their "idols," for this is what they become when they take such an attitude toward them."

That's some good food for thought. But there’s another Bible expression of unity that I want to mention to you…

**(6) A Kingdom Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand:** In Matthew 12:22-32 Jesus discusses blaspheming against the Holy Ghost and in the midst of that He said this: **“Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”** (Matt. 12:25) By the way, that’s an expression of unity – we’ve got to stand together. Ever hear the expression, “United we stand, divided we fall!”? That’s what Jesus is talking about. That’s true about the church even. A church that is divided will not stand and that’s the reason we have to be united! But that’s not all…

**(7) Unite My Heart:** Come with me now to the Psalms – Psalm 86:11 where the psalmist wrote these words: **“Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name.”** By the way, that expression ‘unite my heart’ is a Biblical expression of unity. You know, the Bible often talks about teaching like in 1 Timothy 1:3 where Paul told Timothy in regards to his work, **“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine.”** Teaching no other doctrine will have a tendency to bring about unity (as long as it’s taught in the Bible). You see, unity will not allow the teaching of any doctrine except the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. It includes abiding in the doctrine of Christ like 2 John 9 talks about when it says, **“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”** That’s why we need to speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent. Or as Peter put it, **“If any man speak** (Let me ask you Peter, how do you want a man to speak?)**, let him speak as the oracles of God.”** If every Bible teacher in Northern Michigan, Central Indiana, or the world spoke only as the oracles of God that’d bring about unity, wouldn’t it. We’d all be on the same page. We’d all be teaching the same thing. And wouldn’t that be great? It sure would. But again, **Bible Expressions of Unity**…

**(8) Walk By The Same Rule:** Paul, writing the Philippians again in Philippians 3:16 (it’s also recorded in Galatians 6:16) said this: **“Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.”** He said we need to walk by the same rule. Think about that. If I walk by the rule and you walk by the same rule we’ll be on the same page, right?! We won’t be thinking and teaching different things. And the Bible, the word of God, is our supreme and only rule book. Occasionally we have people who don’t seem to think we have any rules. Kind of like the restaurant Outback Steakhouse where the moto is ‘No Rules, Just Right’ (just throw them out the window) or maybe Burger King where it’s ‘Have It Your Way’. You know, there are lots of people that operate under that principle when it comes to religious matters but that won’t work. We’ve got to get back to respecting rules in order that we might promote and preserve unity within the body of Christ. If we follow the same rules, unity will prevail! You agree with that? I hope you do. One more point and the lesson’s yours…

**(9) That They All May Be One:** On the night before He was crucified Jesus prayed to His Father. Do you know what He prayed for? He prayed that all of His followers might be thousands. Is that right? By the way, did you know that there are something like 350,000 religious bodies in America alone? But do you know what the Lord said about that? Well, I direct you to John chapter 17 verses 20-21 where it says, **“20Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21That they all may be one** (That’s an expression of unity!)**; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”** You know, one reason the world has so much trouble believing what we teach and preach is because of the religious division that exists in the world today. If we would simply present to non-believers a united front it would cause those unbelievers to sit up and take notice. But if folks are divided (and they are) it will keep people from understanding, believing, and obeying the gospel. That’s why we’re admonished not to add to or take away from the word of the Lord. In Revelation 22:18-19 John’s charge was, **“18I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them, may God add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19If anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, may God take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the holy city, which are written in this book.”** Just think of what unity we could have if we would just spend some time with this sacred volume and think about the kinds of things I mentioned to us today. We’d be united, we’d be on the same page, we’d be of the same mind and of the same judgment. (Offer Invitation)