



SESSION 4

ONE HOLY, APOSTOLIC CHURCH

“Unite us!” Shout those words to people who have seen the movie *Braveheart* (Paramount, 2000), and they’ll probably hear you speaking in a Scottish accent, whether you used one or not. Our minds race to William Wallace speaking with Robert the Bruce about the need to unite the clans of Scotland in rebellion against the English. Say these words and someone might respond by yelling, “Freedom!”

Who doesn’t love stories of people coming together, united in the common pursuit of one goal? Following a charismatic leader, driven by a shared passion, they forge ahead toward the prize.

The Bible paints a portrait of the church as holy, passionate, and sent into the world in obedience to Jesus Christ. We’ve seen how the church is comprised of various members, but these members form one body. We are Christ’s body, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and God’s representatives here on earth.

Christians Are Called to...



Unity

In order to understand the church in Acts, it might be helpful to go back to our consideration of the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ. We saw in 1 Corinthians 12 that the metaphor of the body is one way the Scriptures help us consider ourselves and others in Christ. Reaching back to this image, we notice the importance of the little phrase in Acts 4:32 that the saints were of “one heart and mind.” This little phrase explains the actions of the early church.

The Bible testifies that the body of Christ has one head, Christ Himself. Since we have the same head, and He is the source and authority for the body, so our union with Him unifies our hearts and minds around the message of the gospel. This is why the early church was quick to demonstrate their unity in their actions. Why wouldn't they be willing to share with those in need? Does the heart hoard all the blood? Do the lungs charge a fee for oxygen? Of course not. The body naturally helps and serves itself.

Acts 4:32

Now the large group of those who believed were of one heart and mind, and no one said that any of his possessions was his own, but instead they held everything in common.

- Consider how strange the actions of the early believers must have been to outsiders. What reasons would you give to explain the early church's behavior?

You Can Read Minds?

The other day I noticed that my wife was completing nearly all of my sentences during our conversations. We have been married for five years, and she can tell you what I am thinking without me having to say it. She has always been the one in the relationship that could do that. Me? Not so much. If I tried to finish her sentences, they would make no sense.

However, last night after dinner, while I was helping clean up the dishes, I looked at my wife and knew exactly what she was thinking based on her facial expression. Before she could say anything, I blurted out, “dessert.” She started laughing and shaking her head yes. I was right! I decided to press my luck and said, “ice cream.” I was right again. After five years of marriage, I finally could read my wife’s mind. Oh the joy. My wife then asked, “What flavor ice cream do I want?” My mind reading abilities left me and I went totally blank. I couldn’t tell what kind of ice cream she wanted. Of course, it didn’t matter. We got in the car and headed to a local ice cream shop. What did matter was that we were together, eating ice cream.

This is just a silly reminder that we don't need to read minds in order to be close with someone. People are close-knit because they hold the same beliefs and goals. My wife wanted some ice cream, so I wanted to get her some. That was the important part, not me guessing what she wanted. In the church, having the same beliefs and goals are vital for unity. As we see in the book of Acts, the church was of one heart and mind. They were united in their beliefs and goals so much that they considered everything they had to be everyone else's.

Only the gospel can free men and women to be generous because only the gospel calls such sacrifice a wise investment. This is what Jesus meant when He spoke about the necessity of present sacrifice for the sake of future glory.

► With what person would you say you are most united in mind and heart? How does that unity show itself? Where are there evidences of disunity?

[illegible]



Holiness

The church is to be of one heart and mind. We are also called to be holy—conformed not to this world but to our Father who has adopted us. The apostle Peter made this point when he based his call to holiness in God’s holy character.

Holiness and hope share more in common than just a few letters. According to Peter’s first letter, it is the church’s hope for the future that fuels the pursuit of holiness in the present.

► **What person or persons did you seek to be like when you were younger? What did you do to pursue this?**

We will walk in holiness. Not partial holiness. We will not merely appear more holy. We will truly and completely experience total freedom from sin and all of its tragic effects. We will experience complete wholeness.

1 Peter 1:13–16

Therefore, with your minds ready for action, be serious and set your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the One who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.

- What is the difference between seeing holiness as personal (about imitating God) versus abstract (following a list of rules)?

Imitations

The iPhone® is a very popular smartphone. If you don't have one, you probably know someone who does. They aren't just popular here in the US, but all around the world. As a matter of fact, the iPhone is so wildly popular in China that fake iPhones are sold everywhere.

Now, my daughter has a play phone that kind of looks like an iPhone, but it's obvious that it's not real. It's made of plastic, not glass and metal. It doesn't even have an Apple logo on the back. Instead of saying iPhone on the back, it says HiPhone. One glance at the toy and you know it's not a real iPhone. But in China, these are not cheap imitation phones. They are incredible imitations that are hard to tell apart from the real thing.

Just recently in Shanghai, Chinese police broke up an underground black market. They found what they thought were 200 iPhones. They returned the devices to Apple, only to find out that the phones were high quality imitations. That is one close imitation—one close enough to fool the authorities.

Just like the imitation iPhones had something to pattern itself after, we do too. Peter tells us to pattern ourselves after the holiness of God. We are to be holy, because God is holy. However, we don't live this all the time. Sometimes our imitation of God's holiness is like a toy iPhone. If we are going to be like Jesus, conformed to His image, we must be holy. This means living a life that is centered on the gospel. The more you center your life on the gospel, the better imitation of God's holiness you'll display within your life.



Gospel faithfulness

Some things are worth defending, even at great cost. There is a faith worth contending for, a standard of teaching worth preaching and protecting and preserving, even at great personal cost. The gospel calls us to contend for this faith entrusted to us and to entrust it to others.

Right now, you are reading this material because of a long history. Peter, Paul, Stephen, Barnabas, or one of the other apostles and their companions planted churches and trained pastors. Those churches then planted other churches and trained pastors who planted other churches that planted others. One person told another person who told another the good news. For two thousand years, this has happened. Fathers and mothers have told daughters and sons. Men and women have told their neighbors. Others have traveled around the world to distant lands to share the good news.

Jude 3

Dear friends, although I was eager to write you about the salvation we share, I found it necessary to write and exhort you to contend for the faith that was delivered to the saints once for all.

► **What few doctrines would you put in the very center of the Christian faith? What might be other doctrines that would lie outside that center?**

This is part of what it means to be the church. Not only do we have the opportunity and responsibility to contend for the gospel but also the call to deliver it to others.

► Do you find it easier to defend the Bible against skeptics or to deliver the gospel to people who do not know Jesus? Why?

Contend for the Faith

Aaron and Melanie got more than they bargained for when they stopped for gas on a late November night in Kansas City. They were moving to a new home in Missouri when they stopped to fuel up their car. Aaron left the car running, so it would stay warm on the inside. They both stepped out of the car and stood next to the gas pump while Aaron pumped the gas.

As they were pumping the gas, another man snuck up behind them, and in an instance, threw open the door and tried to drive off with the car. Melanie reacted first by using her elbow to smash the glass of the passenger side window, while Aaron jumped in and began to attack the carjacker. As the carjacker pulled out of the gas station Aaron caused him to run into an embankment. The carjacker fled immediately, but no one chased him down. Aaron and Melanie went to these measures because they were concerned with what was in the back seat—their six month-old daughter, Samantha.

Aaron and Melanie's car wasn't that fancy. It was 13 years old when the incident happened. They weren't fighting for the car, but rather for something far more important. In a similar way, Jude tells us to "contend for the faith." That means that sometimes we must go to great lengths with great tenacity in order to carry on the gospel that has been passed down to us. It should be something we contend for as individuals and together as the church. Without the good news of the gospel, people will remain in their sins without knowledge of the One who came to rescue them.

GOD'S STORY, YOUR STORY

In order to understand what it means to be part of the church, you must understand the importance of biblical unity, holiness, and gospel faithfulness. Sometimes the best application the Bible can give us is to replace old and wrong ways of thinking with the way God would have us think and behave. And for many of us, we have wrong perceptions of what it means to be unified with other believers, to live in holiness, or to live out gospel faithfulness. We think that unity is simply congregating together on a Wednesday night or holiness is making sure our actions are good. However, as we learned throughout this lesson, unity and holiness impacts our hearts and lives.

Why do you think it is important that the Bible changes our way of thinking about things?

What is something new you have learned about biblical unity in this session? What are some things you can do to begin implementing biblical unity in your life?

How has the section on holiness challenged you personally?