

1. I am going to preach a message today that I originally preached in July of 2014.
2. I tell you that because the subject of the message is unity.
3. If you were here last Sunday, I spoke about the fact that one of the losses I felt in 2020 was that because of our responses to covid, that there had been damage done to the wonderful Spirit of unity we were experiencing in early 2020.
4. The Lord challenged me to re-preach this message several weeks ago.
5. And just so we are all on the same page. I am going to preach it word for word just as I did in 2014.
6. So, anything that sounds like it might apply to today is because the Lord ordained it to be that way a long time ago.

TEXT: **1 Corinthians 17:17-22** In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. **18** In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. **19** No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. **20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, **21** for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. **22** Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

INTRO:

1. It's that time of year again when many couples are following through with their decision to get married.
2. It is interesting to sit and talk with a bride and groom and find out what their dream is for a wedding ceremony.
3. I have found that most brides want to have their own unique experience and because of that they will want subtle differences in what I say, how I say it, in the colors I wear, in the order in which the wedding party comes into the sanctuary.
4. Some couples prefer to recite vows that I have prepared, other couples prefer to write their own vows.
5. I used to say at the end to the groom, and now you may claim your bride with a kiss and I had a bride balk at that. He doesn't need to claim me. I'm not his property. And I understand.
6. So with all those differences of opinion it can be hard to tell what will come up next.

7. But I have found that in almost all weddings, there is one constant theme that almost never gets neglected.
8. It is the emphasis on the need for and the desire for unity in the marriage. That's not by accident. Because the bible teaches that when a bride and a groom come together to consummate that marriage that they become one in flesh.
9. **Genesis 2:23-24** The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." **24** For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.
10. Now some couples commemorate this unity and this uniting that happens by the lighting of a unity candle. (explain and demonstrate)
11. More recently couples have begun using a sand ceremony. (Explain and demonstrate). I really like the sand ceremony.
12. But regardless of which ceremony they use to illustrate the point, it reminds us that marriage is not just a physical bond between a man and his wife, there is a spiritual bond that occurs as well.
13. God has created the institution of marriage to be a sacred relationship that is held together by the bonds of unity and love.
14. God's desire is that this separate man and woman become unified. That they become one.
15. By the way that's what the word unity actually means.
16. I love the different ways the dictionary defines the word **unity**: *the state of being one; oneness. A whole or totality as combining all its parts into one. The state or fact of being united or combined into one, as of the parts of a whole;*
17. That is a powerful definition. To be one or to be whole. Each and every one of us has been designed by God to desire and long for wholeness.
18. We have been created by God to be complete.
19. Several years ago Ryan Downs who was on our staff shared that he was praying for a particular person and the Holy Spirit showed him that because of wounds and because of abuses in this person's life that they were half a person.
20. They were not complete. The Lord also showed him that it was His desire that this person be whole. That they be complete.
21. All of us want that. All of us need that. All of us secretly long for that. But part of the secret in finding that wholeness is in understanding that none of us are whole. None of us are complete by ourselves.

22. None of us carries within ourselves everything that it takes to create that reality of completeness and wholeness.
23. We only become whole and complete when we are unified with others. When together we bring our individual parts and surrender them to others so that we can be unified or one.
24. It's no bragging matter to say and think; I don't need anybody. I'm just fine by myself. There is a good southern term to describe that way of thinking. Baloney.
25. First of all we cannot find that place of wholeness and completeness apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ.
26. **Genesis 1:26-27** Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." **27** So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
27. God created mankind to dominate and to rule over the physical aspects of this planet. He created mankind to be at the top of the food chain and not at the bottom.
28. But notice with me how that was accomplished. Mankind was made in the image of God. We were made in God's likeness. God, the supreme creator and ruler of the universe knew that we would not be successful in our attempts to rule this earth unless we were made with supernatural qualities that only God himself could bring to our being.
29. We didn't possess these qualities, they had to come from God. We need God to rule this planet.
30. Now some thousands of years later mankind has evolved in his thinking and has become so prideful that he thinks, I don't need God. He still has that desire to rule and to dominate but without God it is a vicious cycle that leaves us empty rather than leaving us feeling whole and complete.
31. We are not whole and complete unless we are unified with Jesus Christ through salvation in Jesus Christ.
32. We need God. But we also need people. We need others.
33. God has created us to live in unity with others as well. We were never meant to be a one man show. We were never made to be self-sufficient and self-made.
34. Oh but pastor you don't know me. I'm self-sufficient. I don't need anybody. I take care of myself.

35. Well if you are self-sufficient then allow me to ask you one question. Exactly how did you birth yourself? How did you make yourself to be born? Explain that to me.
36. Not one person in this room would be here today without someone else. Someone had to birth you.
37. We needed others to come into the world and we need others to be whole and complete as we live out life in this world. Because again, none of us has everything it takes to be successful in life, we need others to make up the parts that are lacking in our lives. We need to be unified with others.
38. It's the only way life truly works. But just as there is a God who completes us, we need to accept that there is a Satan who is working and manipulating so that we never come to a place of wholeness.
39. We must recognize that Satan and his demons are doing everything in their power to kill and destroy all hints at unity in our lives with God and with others.
40. So for the next few weeks we are going to identify potential...

TITLE: Unity Killers.

41. We are going to identify weapons that Satan uses to destroy and kill not only our unity with God but our oneness with others.
42. These unity killers can be recognized and applied to our relationship with God. Our relationship with a spouse, with our children, with our friends and extended family.
43. These unity killers can rear their ugly head at our places of work, on the little league field, just about anywhere people are they can creep up.
44. Though we are going to learn about how this first unity killer works in the context of the church, it can be applied anywhere.
45. So the first unity killer we are going to study today is...

Selfishness

1. If you want to know the definition of selfishness, just put two two-year-olds together in the same room with only one toy. Then sit back and watch the hysteria that will soon erupt.

2. One of those kids is going to see that toy and go right to it. The other is going to want something to play with and eventually will try and take it from the first child and when that happens get ready for world war III.
3. The tears and the tattling and the antagonizing will heat up quickly.
4. Now do you have that picture in your mind? How many can visualize those two toddlers in the room with only one toy?
5. It's sad to say but even as adults, that's exactly what we look like when we allow selfishness to dominate and control our lives.
6. And selfishness will kill any spirit of unity and oneness in a heartbeat. That's why we must come to the Lord for help in dealing with this selfish nature that all of us have living on the inside of us.
7. To see how selfishness plays out let's glance into the life of a church in the city of Corinth.
8. We'll call this church Corinth First Assembly.
9. First of all let's identify the one major problem in this church.
10. **1 Corinthians 11:17-18** In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. **18** In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.
11. Can I first point out that our purpose for relating to one another is not to harm one another it is to do good towards one another?
12. Christians should be people who do good towards others not harm others. That's how God treats us. **Jeremiah 29:11** For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
13. Christians ought to be people through whom God can spread hope and a future.
14. But Corinth First Assembly wasn't doing that. Paul says, I have heard that your meetings do more harm than they do good.
15. What is causing this harm to come at the hands of those who are supposed to be brother and sister in Christ? There were divisions in the church.
16. Rather than their being a spirit of unity where everyone came together to make up the whole, there was a spirit of disunity where everyone was doing their own thing without thinking of others.
17. The culprit was selfishness. And nowhere was that selfishness more evident than when they came together to commemorate the Lord's Supper.

18. In fact Paul said, it's not the Lord's Supper you eat. Because if it was the Lord's Supper there would be unity.
19. But instead this was the scene. **1 Corinthians 11:21-22** for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. **22** Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?
20. Selfishness. Some had food but others didn't. Did the ones who had food show any concern for the ones who didn't? No. They would eat in front of those who didn't have without even offering them a bite.
21. Still others were too busy getting drunk. Wasting what they had on wine, rather than being willing to help someone who had much less.
22. When any group of people get together, whether it be at church, at your job, in a marriage or family setting, when a group of people get together and rather than everyone working for the good of the whole someone makes their selfishness a top priority, trouble and discord and disunity are sure to follow.
23. Here is a key to unity. Again, whether it be in a church setting, work setting, family setting or ball setting. The good of the whole outweighs the wants of a few. There cannot be unity as long as one puts their wants above the good of the whole.
24. Let's look at an example of how that happens.

Judas Iscariot.

1. Jesus was working with everything in his might to unify his twelve disciples. He prays for them in **John 17:20-23** **I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**
2. Jesus knew that the unity of believers everywhere would be the sign to unbelievers that Jesus had been sent by God.
3. We need to never underestimate the power of unity. Jesus wanted them to be unified because the salvation of the world was dependent on it. (Pause)
4. But there was one member of the twelve who wasn't interested in unity and being one. His name was Judas.

5. I have often wondered, how Judas could have been present for all the miracles, all the signs and wonders that Jesus performed and still be more concerned with putting money in his own pocket than the good of the whole?
6. The bible says he was a thief. As the treasurer he would help himself to the moneybag that was being held for the needs of all the disciples.
7. He was so hungry and greedy for money that he even sold Jesus out for 30 pieces of silver.
8. There couldn't be unity because twelve of them were working toward one goal and Judas had his own plans. He didn't want what was best for the group he wanted what was best for Judas.
9. But I have to be careful about how I talk about Judas. Because after Judas came...

Jeff.

1. In about 10 days my wife and I will celebrate 31 years of marriage.
2. I've got to tell you; if you had been around during our first five years of marriage you would know what a miracle that is.
3. You talk about a home where there was a lack of unity. That was our home.
4. By about year five we were fighting non-stop. We had talked about and contemplated divorce. It was bad.
5. And the worse it got the more selfish I got. But at the time I didn't see it as selfishness.
6. I thought well I'm unhappy and she isn't making me happy but I have a right to be happy. As a husband and a father I wasn't concerned with the good of my marriage and my family. I became most concerned about me.
7. I believe that is the cause of many failed marriages. **When one spouse gets selfish they cheat, spend more money than they should and take advantage of the other**, and it won't be long before the other spouse is going to be tempted to become selfish as well. Unity can't exist in that environment.
8. I was at the end of my rope. I didn't know what to do. Fortunately, God knew what to do.

9. I attended a state wide men's retreat, and at that retreat a very well-known counselor and minister taught about marriage and what was killing many marriages.
10. Guess what. The subject was selfishness.
11. He looked across that room at us men and he said men. Some of you have gotten selfish.
12. For the next hour he talked about the needs of women and the needs of men. Really what he was talking about was how each could be complete and whole.
13. But then he said it again. Men. Being selfish won't help you get your needs met. Being demanding won't help you get your needs met.
14. Meeting the needs of your spouse will bring unity in your marriage and when there is unity in your marriage you won't have to worry much about your needs being met.
15. In other words. If the goal was unity he said you can't get there by being selfish.
16. I was so taken back by that message. On the one hand it was the stupidest thing I had ever heard. But on the other hand I was desperate. I needed help.
17. I had tried selfish, I needed to try something else. I went up to the speaker to talk with him after the session and he graciously gave me his notes from his message.
18. I poured over those notes and I studied and I looked up scripture and finally I decided the only way things were going to get better in our marriage was if I quit being selfish and started loving my wife like I had promised I would on our wedding day.
19. And so I started. And that counselor was right. It took some time but she began to respond. And she has been responding ever since.

Conclusion:

1. What about you?
2. Someone in this room desperately needs unity in your home. In your marriage. With your children. With co-workers. With fellow members of the church. With your siblings. With others on the ball field.
3. You have examined the other person up one side and down the other. You have their faults down to a tee. But what about you.

4. Is there some selfishness in you that is hindering the unity and the wholeness and the completeness God longs to bring to your life?
5. One of the keys to unity is to confront the selfishness in our own lives and to replace it with selflessness.
6. To make it our goal to contribute to the wholeness of the other person.
7. Oh Pastor. That won't work. Oh yes it will. When someone, with the help of the Holy Spirit, makes it their goal to promote wholeness and completeness in the life of another, the love that is displayed has a powerful, life altering affect.
8. And that person may not respond immediately, but love, displayed toward another, over a period of time, has the ability to grow into one of the most beautiful relationships there is.
9. Are you practicing selfishness or selflessness?
10. Is selfishness what's keeping you from surrendering your life to Jesus Christ?
11. You need Jesus. Your life will never be complete and whole without him.
12. Hand out the elements of communion.
13. Call for salvation.
14. Have people examine themselves and any selfish attitudes that are lurking in their life.
15. Communion ceremony.