A SCRIPTURE STUDY SHEET

One, *in the Truth*

Why the Bible never asks believers to be united around anything less than what God has revealed

> *"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."*
>
> EPHESIANS 4:13

KING JAMES VERSION

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22 passages · 5 themes

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What This Sheet Argues

Scripture treats unity as the fruit of a shared commitment to revealed truth — not as a goal that can be pursued on its own terms. The passages gathered here run in one direction: unity is *defined* by truth, *grows toward* truth, and is *bounded* by truth when error threatens the flock.

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ON THE TRANSLATION

Every quotation in this sheet is the King James Version (Authorized Version, 1611), which is in the public domain and therefore quoted in full. The KJV was chosen because its wording is the most widely memorized in English and because its literal renderings often preserve the force of the underlying Greek more visibly than modern paraphrases.

Where a modern version differs in a way that changes the argument, the difference is noted in the commentary. Two worth flagging at the outset: *"sleight of men"* in Ephesians 4:14 renders *kybeia* — literally dice-playing, i.e. loaded dice; and *"avoid them"* in Romans 16:17 renders *ekklinate*, a verb of turning aside from a road.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Unity That Has Content

Paul's unity passages are not appeals to good feeling. Each one names the object of the unity — one faith, one doctrine, one gospel — and makes agreement about that object the thing to be kept.

EPHESIANS 4:1–6

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

> **The seven "ones" are doctrinal before they are relational.** "One faith" sits in the middle of the list, flanked by "one Lord" and "one baptism" — a confessed body of belief, not a mood. Note also the verb: *endeavouring to keep*. Unity here is something already given by the Spirit and needing to be preserved, which means the effort runs in the direction of fidelity, not invention.

EPHESIANS 4:13–16

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

> **This is the pivotal text of the whole study.** Unity has a destination — "the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" — which means it is measured by advance in understanding, not by the absence of disagreement. And the alternative to that unity is defined in verse 14 with unusual precision: *"every wind of doctrine."* The opposite of Spirit-given oneness is not independence but instability under false teaching. The KJV's *"sleight of men"* translates *kybeia*, the word for dice-playing — loaded dice; and *"cunning craftiness"* renders *methodeia*, from which we get "method." Error in view is not a sincere mistake but a system.

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine."

EPHESIANS 4:14

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1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

10 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.

> Written to a church split into parties named after teachers. Paul does not answer the factions by asking for tolerance of each party's view; he asks for *"the same mind and the same judgment"* — a unity of assessment, arrived at by correcting the divisions themselves (3:3–4). "Speak the same thing" is a strong phrase: *hina pantes legete to auto*, that you all say the same.

PHILIPPIANS 1:27

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.

> The unity is purposive: *"striving together for the faith of the gospel."* Note the KJV's *"conversation,"* which in 1611 meant conduct or citizenship. The oneness Paul wants is athletic — a shared struggle in a shared cause — which is why it cannot be separated from the content of the gospel that defines the cause.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1–2

1 If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2 fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

> The four "ifs" are not doubts but grounds: because these things are true of you, therefore be of one mind. The unity Paul commands is an inference from shared salvation — it is the social consequence of a common standing in Christ, which is why abandoning the doctrine that creates that standing would empty the command of its premise.

CHAPTER TWO

Truth as the Church's Charter

Three passages establish what the church is before any passage tells the church how to behave: a people sanctified in truth, gathered around apostolic teaching, and constituted as the pillar that holds truth up.

JOHN 17:17–21

17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 that they all may be one; 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.

> **The sequence matters more than the famous verse.** Jesus prays for sanctification *in truth* (v. 17), defines the truth as God's word (v. 17), and only then prays for oneness (v. 21) — and the oneness is for those who believe *"through their word,"* the apostolic message. The unity of John 17 is therefore unity inside a message, not unity in place of one. To cite verse 21 while setting aside the word of verses 17 and 20 is to detach the prayer from its own stated basis.

ACTS 2:42

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

> The first description of church life puts doctrine first — *"the apostles' doctrine and fellowship,"* a single definite article governing both nouns in the Greek. The fellowship is *of* the doctrine; it is not an additional item on a list. This is the New Testament's earliest snapshot of what unity looked like in practice, and its first ingredient is content taught by authorized witnesses.

1 TIMOTHY 3:15

15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

> Two architectural metaphors: *pillar* (which displays and holds up a public inscription) and *ground* or foundation (which supports). The church's identity is truth-bearing — that is what the household of God is *for* in the world. A body that ceases to hold up the truth has not merely lost an emphasis; it has lost its function.

JUDE 3–4

3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. 4 For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

> **"Once delivered" — *hapax paradotheisē* — is the whole argument in two words.** The faith is a deposit handed over once for all, which is why it can be contended for rather than negotiated. Jude had intended to write about the salvation they shared; the presence of false teachers forced him to write about the faith's defense instead. That shift, stated openly in verse 3, is itself instructive: the same salvation that unites also requires a boundary.

2 TIMOTHY 4:3–4

3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4 and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

> The mechanism of division is described here as a market: teachers are *heaped up* to suit desire, and the ear is *turned away* from truth toward fables. Note that the departure is from "sound doctrine" — *hugiainousēs didaskalias*, healthy teaching — a medical metaphor. Error is not a difference of taste; it is a pathology, and the passage predicts that congregations will select for it.

CHAPTER THREE

When Error Severs Fellowship

This is the category most often left out of discussions of unity — and it is where the principle is stated most explicitly. Every New Testament writer draws a line, and every line is doctrinal.

ROMANS 16:17–18

17 Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. 18 For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

> **The test is not that division exists, but what the division is contrary to.** The divisive are identified as those who act *"contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned"* — a received standard, external to the parties involved. Three verbs carry the instruction: *mark* (*skopein*, to keep your eye on), *avoid* (*ekklinate*, to turn aside from a road), and, in verse 18, the description of the method — *"good words and fair speeches,"* smooth speech that works on the *simple*, the undiscerning. The KJV's *"offences"* is *skandala*: stumbling blocks, trip-wires. Error here is not merely wrong; it is booby-trapped.

GALATIANS 1:6–9

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

> The strongest statement in the New Testament on this subject, and it is about doctrine alone. Paul distinguishes *heteron* from *allo* in verse 7 — a different gospel "which is not another," i.e. a counterfeit, not an alternative. The standard is double: what *we preached* and what *ye have received*. And the curse is pronounced even on an angel — removing every appeal to charismatic authority, antiquity, or sincerity as a ground for unity with error.

2 JOHN 9–11

9 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. 10 If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11 for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

> Hospitality itself is at stake — the house church and the greeting were the mechanism by which traveling teachers were commended to the next congregation. To *"bid him God speed"* (*chairein*, to greet with a blessing) is to endorse the mission. Note the alternative in verse 9: abiding in the doctrine, or not having God. The line drawn is not between better and worse Christians but between those who remain in the teaching and those who have left it.

TITUS 3:9–11

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. 10 A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; 11 knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

> **The necessary counterweight to chapter three.** The same letter that demands separation also forbids generating conflict over *"foolish questions"* — the word is *zētēseis*, speculative inquiries. And the process is patient: *first and second admonition* before rejection. The KJV's *"heretick"* is *hairetikos*, a factious person — one who forms a party around himself. Separation is a last step, taken twice-warned, and aimed at a person who is *"subverted"* (turned out of the way).

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6, 14–15

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. … 14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

> **The aim of separation is stated, and it is remedial.** Withdrawal is "that he may be ashamed" — a step toward recovery, not a verdict. Verse 15 then forbids the attitude that usually accompanies withdrawal: *"count him not as an enemy."* Any use of this passage to justify contempt, or to treat a brother as a hostile outsider, contradicts the verse that completes it.

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14–17

14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? 15 And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? 16 And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.

> Five rhetorical questions, each built on an impossibility: fellowship, communion, concord, part, agreement. The image is agricultural — a yoke binds two animals to one plough, and unequal yoking means one sets the pace and direction for both. The governing category is not "different opinions" but righteousness versus unrighteousness, light versus darkness, Christ versus Belial.

1 JOHN 4:1, 6

1 Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. … 6 We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

> A command to evaluate, with a stated criterion in the verses between (the confession of Jesus Christ come in the flesh). *"Try"* is *dokimazete*, the word for testing metal or coin — assay, not suspicion. The chapter closes with a binary the modern ear finds uncomfortable: the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, distinguished by whether one hears the apostolic witness.

MATTHEW 7:15 · 2 PETER 2:1–2

15 Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

1 But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. 2 And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

> Both passages describe error as *dressed* — sheep's clothing, and false teaching introduced *privily* (secretly, alongside). Peter adds the consequence that matters for this study: the way of truth is blasphemed *because of* those who follow the pernicious ways. Toleration of error does not protect the gospel's reputation; it damages it.

CHAPTER FOUR

Truth and Peace in the Old Testament

The grain of the argument is not a New Testament novelty. Israel's prophets and sages already treat agreement as the precondition of walking together, and bind truth to peace as a single pair.

AMOS 3:3

3 Can two walk together, except they be agreed?

> **The tersest statement of the principle in Scripture.** A rhetorical question with an obvious answer, set in a series of cause-and-effect questions (does a lion roar in the forest without prey?). The Hebrew *no'ad* carries the sense of meeting by appointment — coming to the same place. Two people cannot share a road while heading in different directions; agreement is not a prerequisite for pleasant company but for shared travel.

PROVERBS 14:15

15 The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going.

> The contrast is between credulity and circumspection, and the KJV's *"looketh well to his going"* is literally "considers his step" — he examines the path before committing weight to it. In the wisdom literature, believing everything is not a virtue but a mark of the *simple* (*pethi*), the one who has not yet learned to weigh a claim.

ZECHARIAH 8:16–17, 19

16 These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: 17 and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD. … 19 … therefore love the truth and peace.

> **"Truth and peace" is a single compound in this chapter.** The gate was the court — the place where truth was adjudicated and community restored. God does not offer truth as an alternative to peace, nor peace at truth's expense: the command is to *love* both, and the KJV's "execute the judgment of truth and peace" makes the pairing a judicial duty. Ephesians 4:25 is this verse quoted into the church ("speak every man truth with his neighbour"), with a new ground: *for we are members one of another.*

EPHESIANS 4:25

25 Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.

> The logic is circular in the right way: we must speak truth because we belong to each other, and lying to a member contradicts the membership. Falsehood inside a body is not a private failing; it is a wound to the body's own tissue.

"Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates."

ZECHARIAH 8:16

CHAPTER FIVE

The Balance: Truth in Love, Not Truth as a Weapon

These passages are the ones most often quoted against the argument of this sheet. Read closely, they do not weaken it — they specify the manner in which it must be held.

EPHESIANS 4:2–3 — READ BEFORE VERSE 13

2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

> **Paul builds the unity of the Spirit out of four low words** — lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance — before he ever mentions doctrine. The order is deliberate and it rules out a certain temperament: the person who uses "contend for the faith" as a license for harshness has skipped the three verses that introduce the command. Note also that verses 2–3 concern *keeping* a unity already given; the burden of proof lies with the one who would disturb it.

EPHESIANS 4:15 — "SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE"

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.

> The participle *alētheuontes* can mean "speaking truth" or "being true to" — several modern versions footnote "holding to the truth." Either way the phrase is a single act, not two: truth is the content and love is the manner, and neither is optional. What the verse forbids is not controversy but the separation of the two — truth without love, or love without truth. Both produce children "tossed to and fro."

TITUS 3:9 — THE LIMIT ON CONTROVERSY

9 But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

> The line Scripture draws is not "doctrine versus no doctrine" but doctrine *once delivered* versus speculation. Questions that generate strife without edifying are to be dropped. This is the passage that prevents the argument of chapter three from becoming a personality: the same apostle who demands separation from false teaching demands silence on the speculative.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:15 — THE MANNER OF SEPARATION

15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

> The single most important verse for how the previous chapter is applied. Withdrawal is real, but the posture is familial and the aim is restoration. Admonition — *nouthetein*, to place in the mind — presumes continued contact and continued hope.

"Speaking the truth in love" is not a compromise between two duties. It is one act with two inseparable properties.

ON EPHESIANS 4:15

SUMMARY

The Argument in One Page

Five movements, and the passage that carries each one.

THE CLAIM	PASSAGES	WHAT THE TEXT ACTUALLY SAYS
Unity has doctrinal content	Eph 4:4–6; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 1:27; 2:1–2	"One faith" stands in a list of confessional unities; the Corinthians are told to have the same mind and judgment, not merely the same table.
Unity grows toward truth	Eph 4:13–16	The destination is "the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God"; its opposite is being "carried about with every wind of doctrine."
Truth is the church's charter	John 17:17–21; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 3:15; Jude 3	Sanctified in truth, gathered on apostolic doctrine, constituted as truth's pillar, contending for a faith "once delivered."
Error dissolves the basis of fellowship	Rom 16:17–18; Gal 1:6–9; 2 John 9–11; Titus 3:10; 2 Thess 3:6, 14; 2 Cor 6:14–17; 1 John 4:1, 6; Matt 7:15; 2 Pet 2:1–2	Every boundary in the New Testament is drawn on doctrine, and every writer draws one — with the standard always being what was received, never personal preference.
But truth must be held in love	Eph 4:2–3, 15, 25; Titus 3:9; 2 Thess 3:15; Zech 8:16, 19	Humility and forbearance precede the doctrine; speculation is to be dropped; the separated brother is still a brother; truth and peace are loved together.

Questions for Study or Discussion

01 In Ephesians 4:4–6, Paul lists seven "ones." Which of them are confessional, and which are relational? Does the list allow for unity that has no shared content?

02 Ephesians 4:13 calls unity a destination still ahead ("till we all come"). What does that imply about the relationship between unity and ongoing teaching?

03 Romans 16:17 measures division against "the doctrine which ye have learned." How would you distinguish, in practice, a doctrine you have received from a preference you hold?

04 Jude 3 says the faith was "once delivered." What difference does that phrase make to how doctrinal disputes should be settled?

05 Titus 3:9 commands avoidance of "foolish questions," while chapter three of this sheet argues for separation over doctrine. Where is the boundary, and who decides?

06 2 Thessalonians 3:15 forbids counting the withdrawn brother an enemy. What practices would keep separation remedial rather than punitive?

07 Zechariah 8:19 commands Israel to "love the truth and peace." What does it look like to pursue one of those at the expense of the other — and why does the prophet refuse the trade?