

E Pluribus Unum In Christo

Select Passages

Let me take you back to the late 1800s. America had been through a lot—civil war, growing pains, and the struggle of becoming a nation that truly knew how to live together. People were looking for something that could bring them together—something simple that reminded them they were part of one big family, even with all their differences.

Enter a man named Francis Bellamy. He was a Baptist minister and a writer. In 1892, he penned a short, powerful statement meant to help schoolchildren feel connected to their country. It wasn't intended to be political, and it surely wasn't meant to divide. It was about unity—pure and simple.

The original words were these: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

That's it. Just 23 words—short enough for a child to memorize, but deep enough to stir a whole country. Over time, the wording shifted a bit. "The Flag" became "the flag of the United States of America," and in 1954, during a time of global uncertainty and a renewed desire to stand on shared values, the words "under God" were added. That's how we arrived at the version we know today.

But what I love most is this: the heart behind it was unity. And that message? It echoes something even deeper—something greater. Because before we are Americans, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. In His kingdom, there are no borders, no political lines—just one body, united in love, under the Lordship of Jesus.

Now, remember—Francis Bellamy was a Baptist minister. And I can't help but believe the values reflected in the Pledge echo his own convictions, which are clearly aligned with several New Testament passages. Today, we're going to look at a few of them.

Unity in the Letters of Paul

The first is found in Galatians. Here's a bit of context: Paul had preached the gospel of grace, freeing the Galatians from the burden of the Mosaic Law. But after he moved on, others came in behind him, teaching that believers needed to act like observant Jews—practicing circumcision, keeping kosher, and so on. The result was confusion and division within the church.

That's what prompted Paul to write his letter. And in chapter three, he addresses this disunity head-on:

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free,

there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians 3:26–29)

To another congregation—this one in Colossae—Paul addressed a different issue: mysticism and spiritual elitism. But his counsel was much the same:

"...and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." (Colossians 3:10–11)

Taken together, these two passages reveal something powerful: for those who are in Christ, religious heritage (Jew or Greek), gender (male or female), social status (slave or free), culture, and nationality simply do not define us. Unity is found in Christ, who transcends every label, category, and cultural divide. Even when our needs and perspectives don't always align, we are bound together by Someone far greater.

Unity in the Prayer of Jesus

But unity doesn't always come naturally. Our Lord certainly understood that.

At the Passover meal, just before His crucifixion, Jesus lifted His eyes to heaven and prayed—not just for the disciples sitting at the table with Him, but for us as well. He said:

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me." (John 17:20–23)

It's worth pointing out that while Jesus also prayed for His disciples to be sanctified in truth—that is, by God's word (John 17:17)—and to be protected from the evil one (John 17:15), His primary focus in this moment was their unity.

This was one of His last prayers before going to the cross. And what was on His heart? That His followers would be united—not just in belief, but in love, in purpose, and in relationship with one another. That they would be one, just as He and the Father are one.

Unity in the Local Church

It seems to me that most believers genuinely affirm the importance of unity—but often struggle to live it out. To put it another way, we value unity, but we're not always sure what it looks like in practice. Thankfully, Paul offers more guidance.

The Corinthian church had its share of problems. There were civil disputes, moral failures, and a strong undercurrent of selfishness—all of which undermined the unity they were meant to have. But rather than simply scolding them, Paul points to a deeper truth: that their

individual differences—whether in spiritual gifts, types of service, or personal backgrounds—were not threats to unity, but part of God’s design for it. They were all members of the body of Christ, each with a unique role to play.

Paul devotes all of 1 Corinthians 12 to this theme. Let’s look at just a brief excerpt:

“For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.” (1 Corinthians 12:12–14)

He echoes the same idea in his letter to the Romans:

“For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” (Romans 12:4–5)

You don’t need to be like me—and I don’t need to be like you—for us to serve the Lord together. But we do need to value and encourage one another, especially when we face challenges. As Abundant Life Church seeks to grow and serve, we can find great inspiration in watching God use us—with all our differences—to advance His kingdom.

Everyone has a role to play.

Unity in the Mission

There are many churches to choose from in Simi Valley. Have you ever wondered why someone might want to visit us at Abundant Life Church, or consider getting more involved here? There are certainly things we can’t do right now that other churches can—like sponsoring a youth program or holding services in a building we own. But what we can do is far more than we often realize.

Consider this: Jesus began with just twelve disciples. And they came from diverse—and even conflicting—backgrounds.

Peter, Andrew, James, and John were fishermen—working-class businessmen. Matthew was a tax collector. And I’ve never met a businessman who particularly enjoys spending time with someone from the IRS.

Then there was Simon the Zealot—a political radical who likely viewed Matthew as a traitor, collecting taxes for the Romans. We don’t know as much about the others, though church history suggests Bartholomew may have come from a noble background, and Thomas might have been an architect or builder.

They were different. And at times, they didn’t exactly get along. The Gospels even record arguments among them—like when they debated who would be the greatest in the

kingdom. But in time, they became unified in purpose. And the result? The worldwide spread of the gospel.

Call to Action – One in Christ

So, here's the challenge: We've seen what unity looks like in Scripture—from Paul's letters, from Jesus' own prayer, and from the early disciples who didn't start out unified but became one in purpose. Now it's our turn.

Unity isn't just something we talk about or agree with in theory. It's something we choose to pursue. It's something we practice. And it doesn't mean we're all the same, or that we always see eye to eye. It means we're willing to love, to serve, to forgive, and to show up for one another—because Christ has done all of that for us.

So here at Abundant Life Church, let's ask ourselves:

- Who can I encourage this week?
- Where can I lend a hand, even if it's outside my comfort zone?
- Is there someone I've distanced myself from that I need to draw closer to?
- Am I willing to see every person here as a part of the same body, with a role that matters—just like mine does?

Jesus prayed that we would be one. That prayer wasn't just for a roomful of disciples 2,000 years ago. It was for us. For this church. For this moment. Let's be the answer to that prayer. Let's be one in Christ.

Our Spiritual Motto – “E Pluribus Unum, In Christo”

The United States has a motto. You've probably seen it on our coins and currency: “E Pluribus Unum”—Latin for “out of many, one.” It's more than just a phrase. It's a guiding ideal, a reminder that this nation was built from a diverse group of people coming together to form something unified. You'll also find it on the Great Seal of the United States—used on passports, presidential proclamations, military insignia, and engraved on buildings like the Library of Congress.

But as I reflect on what that means for our church, I would add two simple words: “in Christo” (in Christ). “Out of many, one—in Christ.” This ought to be our motto. This should be our spiritual currency.

The world may strive for unity through shared interests, common goals, or cultural ties. But what holds the body of Christ together is far deeper. It's not our backgrounds, our preferences, or even our personalities—it's Jesus. He is the glue, the foundation, the lifeblood of our unity. So let this be the banner we live under, the message we carry, and the hope we model to the world: Out of many, one—in Christ.