

LESSON 5

Unity That Reflects Christ to the World

John 17:20–23; Ephesians 4:15–16

“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34–35).

Class Overview: In this lesson, we examine how unity within the church serves as a visible testimony to the reality of Jesus Christ. Scripture teaches that unity is not merely for internal harmony or effectiveness, but for witness. When we live together in truth, love, humility, and shared purpose, the world sees a reflection of Christ’s character and the transforming power of the gospel. Drawing from Jesus’ prayer in John 17 and Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4, this lesson challenges us to see unity as a responsibility that directly impacts how Christ is perceived by others.

Class Objectives:

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

1. Explain why Christian unity is essential to the church’s witness.
2. Identify how unity reflects the character and mission of Christ.
3. Recognize how disunity distorts the gospel before the watching world.
4. Understand the connection between truth, love, and credible witness.
5. Commit to living in a way that visibly honors Christ through unity.

Introduction

MOST PEOPLE DECIDE WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT CHRISTIANITY LONG BEFORE THEY EVER READ THE BIBLE. They watch how Christians speak to one another. They notice how churches handle disagreement. They listen to the tone of conversations and the spirit behind convictions. For many, the church itself becomes the lens through which they evaluate Jesus.

Jesus understood this. He knew that the credibility of His message would not rest only on what His followers believed, but on how they lived together. That is why, on the night before the cross, He prayed not for comfort or safety, but for unity among those who would follow Him.

Unity, then, is not merely an internal concern for the church; it is a public testimony. When we live together in truth, love, humility, and grace, we reflect something the world cannot manufacture on its own. This lesson invites us to see unity not as a secondary issue or a personal preference, but as a vital part of how Christ is made visible to the world.

Unity is Part of Jesus' Mission (John 17:20–23)

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed a prayer that reveals what He believed would most powerfully shape the future of His people. Amazingly, His prayer was not primarily about protection from suffering or success in mission; it was about unity. Jesus prayed not only for the apostles who stood before Him, but for all who would believe through their message. That includes the church in every generation.

His request is specific: *that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.* The unity He prays for is relational and spiritual, modeled after the unity between the Father and the Son. This tells us that unity is not optional or secondary; it is woven into the very mission of Christ. Most importantly, Jesus connects unity directly to belief in the world. Twice, He says that this oneness exists *so that the world may believe* and *so that the world may know.* When we live

in reconciled, loving relationships, we give visible evidence that the gospel is real and transformative.

This does not remove truth or conviction. Jesus prays that we would be sanctified by the truth earlier in the chapter (John 17:17). Therefore, unity is unity *in truth*, not at the expense of it. The church reflects Christ most clearly when it holds firmly to the truth while living it out in love and mutual devotion. Jesus also mentions glory in this prayer: the glory given to Him by the Father and shared with His followers. This is evident when His character is visible in His people. Unity reflects God's own nature and work among us. It is something the world needs to see. Jesus prayed for it because the credibility of His mission depends on it.

Unity Displays the Character of Christ (Ephesians 4:15–16; Colossians 3:12–15)

While Jesus shows us that unity is part of His mission, Paul helps us see what that unity looks like in everyday life. In Ephesians 4:15–16, Paul explains that the body grows as we speak the truth in love and are joined together under Christ's headship. Truth and love are not competing values; they belong together. Truth without love becomes harsh and divisive, while love without truth becomes shallow and misleading. When both are present, the church reflects Christ's balance of conviction and compassion.

It is also important to consider Colossians 3:12–15, where we learn to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. These qualities are the visible evidence of Christ's rule in the heart. Unity is kept when we willingly bear with one another and extend forgiveness, just as Christ has forgiven us. This is part of our new identity. We are *God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved*. Unity flows from remembering who we are in Christ.

In verse 15, Paul concludes by emphasizing peace and gratitude. The peace of Christ is meant to rule in the body, guiding relationships and decisions. Gratitude softens the heart, reduces entitlement, and builds mutual appreciation. Together, these qualities make unity visible and

compelling. The world does not expect perfection from the church, but it does recognize authenticity. When we treat one another with grace, patience, and love, especially in moments of tension, the character of Christ becomes unmistakable. Unity becomes a testimony not because the church is flawless, but because Christ is clearly at work within it.

Disunity Distorts the Gospel (John 13:34–35)

If unity reflects Christ, then disunity inevitably distorts Him. In 1 Corinthians 1, divisions in the church were forming around personalities, preferences, and loyalties. Paul asked, *Is Christ divided?* The answer is obvious. Division misrepresents the very nature of Christ and His work. When a church fractures, the message of the cross becomes confused. Allegiance shifts from Christ to human leaders, opinions, or groups, and the focus moves away from what Christ has done to what people prefer. Disunity does not stay internal; it reshapes how the gospel is perceived.

Let's focus on John 13:34–35. Jesus declared that love among His people would be the defining mark of true discipleship. When that love is absent or replaced by hostility, suspicion, or indifference, the world receives a distorted picture of Christ. Disunity tells the world a story, but it is the wrong one. It suggests that Christ cannot deeply reconcile people, that the gospel lacks transforming power, or that personal agendas matter more than shared faith. Even when doctrine is sound, fractured relationships undermine credibility. The message may be true, but it does not appear believable.

This does not mean the church must avoid disagreement or difficult conversations. The apostles never equate unity with silence or compromise. Rather, unity is revealed in how we handle differences, whether with humility and love or with pride and division. The *manner* of our disagreement often speaks louder than the content of our convictions. Disunity is never neutral. It actively obscures Christ and weakens the church's witness.

For Application

Unity in the church is not a private matter; it is a public testimony. Jesus made it clear that how we live together would determine whether the world believes in Him. Every conversation, disagreement, act of forgiveness, and display of love contributes to the picture of Christ that others see. Our relationships within the body reflect Christ's character. Unity grows when we choose truth with love, humility over pride, and reconciliation over distance. The world does not need a perfect church, but it does need a church that takes Jesus seriously enough to live like Him.

We also **need to recognize that unity requires effort.** It doesn't mean avoiding difficult conversations or ignoring differences, but addressing them in a way that reflects Christ. The way we disagree matters. The way we communicate is important. How we treat each other during tense moments often reveals more than what we claim to believe.

Finally, **take personal responsibility for the church's witness.** Unity is not just someone else's job. It starts with our own words, attitudes, and actions. When we live in Christlike unity, the gospel is not only spoken but also shown. And when Christ is clearly seen in His people, the world has a reason to believe.

Memory Verse and Weekly Challenge

Memory Verse:

"May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me." — John 17:21 (CSB)

Challenge:

This week, be aware that the world is watching how Christians live together. Pay attention to your words, tone, and attitudes toward other brothers and sisters, especially in moments of disagreement or frustration. Choose one act that reflects Christlike unity: offer forgiveness, speak graciously about another Christian, seek reconciliation where there is distance, or encourage unity through your

words. Pray daily that your relationships within the church would make Christ more visible to others.

For Reflection

1. Why did Jesus connect unity among believers so closely with the world's belief in Him (John 17:20–23)?

2. How do our relationships within the church shape how others perceive Christ and the gospel?

3. In what ways can disunity distort the message of the gospel, even when correct doctrine is being taught?

4. Why does the way Christians handle disagreement often speak louder than the disagreement itself?

5. What is one specific way we can each help our congregation reflect Christ more clearly through unity this week?
