



Living More Like Jesus Part – 7

Strengthening Our Unity

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, how well do you think the Trinity is getting along these days? Are the persons of the Godhead doing all right? They're having pretty good fellowship. Do you think maybe the Father is a little bitter toward the Son? Maybe a little resentful. Maybe the Son is, I don't know, a little bent out of shape with the Holy Spirit but is still being polite. But, you know, it's not as good as it used to be. A little cold. Maybe the Holy Spirit's not all that keen on the Father especially with all that attention the Father is spending on the Son. Maybe things aren't all that great between the members of the Godhead. What do you think? Maybe? Well, that's crazy, isn't it? That's crazy, Pastor Mike. How dare you say such a thing? Well that's true. That's not happening between the members of the Godhead. We can be sure of that. But it sure is happening among people who go to the same church, I know that. That's happening quite a bit. And it's not that people are in yelling matches and screaming at each other in the parking lot or in the lobby of the church, but there is a lot of unspoken tension, let's just put it that way. Some underlying resentment, some bitterness. A lot of things that go on in the church that I think you'd say are less than what they ought to be. Let's put it this way. You don't have to leave a church to have emotionally checked out of the relationships at the church, if you know what I mean. There are a lot of people who are just kind of tolerating each other. And as a matter of fact, there are plenty of people whom they probably avoid that they don't much care for and it's just kind of a formalized relationship. It's niceties here and, you know, hello there. But there's no warmth. There's no real genuine kindness. The relationship isn't what it should be.

Well, what does that have to do with the Trinity? I'm glad you asked me that, because in John 17 when Jesus was praying just before he went to the cross. It's recorded this way in verse 21. I'll paraphrase it for you. Jesus is in essence saying I really want my followers, I want them to have the kind of harmonious, peaceful relationships, warmth and loving relationship with each other that we have in the inner Trinitarian relationships that we have. That's in essence what he says. As a matter of fact, he goes on two verses later in verse 23 and he says this, he says, "That they may become," here's the adverb, "perfectly one," even as we are, he says to the Father. That's just an amazing truth. As a matter of fact, in verse 21 and verse 23 in that passage he tells us why, the second half of both of those verses, he says the reason for it, do you remember the reason why he wants the relationships in the Church to reflect the kind of harmonious, warm, you know, perfect fellowship that they have in the Godhead? It says, "so that the world may know that," he says to the Father, "that you sent me."

Now that's an echo of what he had already said in John Chapter 13 verse 35, when he says to the disciples, you know, "if you have love for one another," the way that I've loved you, well, then "all people will know that you're my disciples." Because there are plenty of groups around the world and they associate with one another for a lot of different reasons, usually because they share an interest. Of course, you're thrown together at work with people you have to work with, you've thrown together in a neighborhood, people you have to live next



door to you. But a lot of people voluntarily associate with lots of different groups because they share an interest. Right? Maybe they're in a golf club or a country club or whatever, or maybe they have some kind of, you know, car club they're in or whatever they're in. They've got some shared interests and they have a kind of guild, a kind of organization, whatever. And it's just how it is in the world. They all have a commonality because they share an interest.

But Jesus says that's not the way it's supposed to be with my people. Of course they have a shared interest. Of course they have a shared theology. And of course they have a shared experience in the fact that I've done something in their lives. But that's the supernatural difference. And the Bible says that the Spirit of God is supposed to change each individual's heart. And I can't assume every last one of you is a regenerate person but let's just say that most of us, let's just hope, are. And because most of us are, the work of God's Spirit in our hearts is supposed to be as the New Testament says the Spirit is supposed to bind us together in unity, in fellowship, and that's a supernatural thing. And that's why Jesus said it should be different among this group. It shouldn't just look like a car club or a golf club. This is going to be a group where people's hearts are going to be knit together the way Jesus says that the Father and the Son are one. That's a big, big deal. And it's one that should challenge us. And when it starts to slip, as it was in Corinth, Paul has to write them to make a pretty strong appeal to them to say we've got to fix this. Well, you just can't have niceties. We just can't have politeness. We can't just do what we're doing and kind of get along without arguing. There needs to be genuine, warm, connective, harmonious, unified relationships in the body of Christ. That's what Jesus expected. That's what he says is going to be a billboard to the world that we're really something other than just another human club. And he said I expect that.

And Paul is going to do something that you would think would be awkward, because the problem was the Corinthians were thinking wrongly about him. And yet he's still going to appeal to the fact that we've got to fix this. And he does that in three short verses. They're transitional verses. And we're going to get into our next series, Lord willing, next time as we get together and we'll venture into that next section. But these are transitional verses where he kind of gets out of what he's been talking about to deal with their unity. And he says, you know, we can't go on the way we've been going on. Let me show you these verses, and we can find a lot in this text that will help us to kind of see that we've a long way to go, maybe, to make our relationships at church the way they're supposed to be.

So follow along with me as I read this for you. In Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 11 through 13. Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verses 11 through 13. Three verses and three points. And man, I'm not going to do any fancy Harlem Globetrotters work here. This is just like, straightforward. No applause. Nothing confusing about this outline. Three verses, three points, one from each verse. How great is that? Amazing. Let me read it for you with some commentary because we need some commentary here. Verse 11. Did you find it? "We have spoken freely to you." Now who's the we? It starts this way in verse 1 of Chapter 1. Right? This is Paul and Timothy, he's representing his whole missionary band, and he's saying listen, "we have spoken freely to you." And of course they had outside of this letter, they had in previous letters, they had when they were there physically in the geography of Corinth when



they were ministering there. But certainly in this book as well he'd spoken freely to them. "You, Corinthians; our heart is wide open." Now if you've been around church for a while you know that something has shifted in western modern society to take the word "heart" and make it in our day the seat of our emotions. And I've tried to correct this because it's hard for us to read the Bible and to see this Greek word "Kardia." Like you go to the cardiologist, "the heart," that's a Greek word for heart. And to say, okay, whenever I see heart, I think about the seat of our emotions.

But that's not what the word "heart" really represents, although it kind of can bleed into that, as we'll see. But it really is the seat of our thinking. It's the cockpit of our intellect and our volition and how we prioritize things. And so in this statement here, he says, we have "spoken freely to you ... our heart is wide open." This is a statement about his kind of directness, his honesty, his genuineness in his speech to them. But look at where it goes in verse 12. "You are not restricted by us," I mean, we're not restricting you in any way, "but you are restricted in your own." What's the English word there? "Affections." Now, that's the Greek word you've probably heard from on the platform before if you've been around here because it's the Greek word that is translated, if you were to literally translate it, your guts, your intestines. Right? That's the word "Splanchnon." And I often talk about that when we're looking at passages where it talks about Jesus having compassion, like in the end of Matthew Chapter 9 in verse 36, he "saw the crowds." They're "like sheep without a shepherd." "They're harassed and helpless." "He has compassion for them." He has splanchnon on them. He feels something affectionate for them. And so then he's going to act.

And so splanchnon is more of the seat of emotions. As a matter of fact, that's how they would view the seat of emotions. Now, it didn't catch on because it doesn't really work on a Valentine's Day card to have your picture of your intestines. It's better to have a heart, I suppose. But you need to notice that kind of distinction. Not that it's a hard distinction, but certainly if I use the word splanchnon I'm talking about the seat of your emotions, affection. Here's how it's translated, sometimes compassion. Something stirs in me. I feel something toward you. Right? And usually you talk about your heart. Sometimes we do think about the word agape or love, but it's much more of a thoughtful thing, a decision, a priority. We'll talk about that. But he says you're not having an open kind of genuine conversation. As a matter of fact, your affections for us have been stifled, restricted. "In return," he says, "(I speak to you as children.)"

Now, parenthetically, as it's put in our English translation here, we've already learned in the first book we've quoted a few times in our study so far in Second Corinthians that he had mentioned that he had been the founder of this church. We read about it in the book of Acts. He comes into Corinth and he gets this church started as the founding, you know, missionary of the church in Corinth. And in that sense, he says you had a lot of teachers, you had a lot of pastors and so forth coming and teaching but you really have only one founder of this church. And he kind of pulls rank in that, not in some nasty way, but he's saying, you know, I have a special place in your history, in your past. And so that may be part of what this is because he's talked that way in the past in these letters. But it's almost really dipping into some other aspects as we'll see when we get to verse 13. And then he says, "widen." Now your English



text says widen your what? Hello? You're still with me, right? "Your hearts." Now the word "heart" is not here in the text. It's supplied by the translators to make sense of it, because basically it says you need to "widen you," like yourself. Widen what? And instead of going back to the word *splankhnon* in verse 12 the translators go back to verse 11 because the same word lifted from the form of the word "widen" is there. He's widened his heart. Right? Heart is open to them, is open wide. And now he's saying with an imperative verb in verse 13, "widen you" like, well, okay. Before I just buy that translation even though I'm not against it, because certainly I think it's arguable that he wants them to widen what he's widened. And he did use the word *kardia*, "heart" in verse 11. I mean, the immediate predicate for this would certainly include their *splankhnon*. He wants a warm, not just a decisive kind of love, he wants a warm kind of affection coming from them, and he wants them to widen, not only his sincerity of speech, but he wants them to widen their affection for him because it's not the way it's supposed to be.

Now, it's a bit of a complicated set of words here, but hopefully in the introduction you've seen the concern that we should have is that our relationship should be something positive that would be the result of what he's aiming for here, a warm, true, unified, harmonious, good relationship with the people at our church. Which means if you're coming late to church and leaving early, or all you do is a Sunday morning, then you're not really doing church because you can't do church that way. I mean, you cannot have these kinds of relationships unless you do more than that. And at the very least you're going to have to linger around and build relationships in the body of Christ. That's what we expect, and that's what God expects, and that's what we're supposed to have. And we can prove that all throughout the New Testament.

Let's just start taking one verse at a time and deal with each of these. And let's start with the communication because that's what we're dealing with in verse 11. "We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open." Now, taking those two phrases together what we really get here is that we're being sincere, we're being honest, we're speaking our mind. Right? And it's going to lead to *splankhnon* and affection, love and warmth and all that. But he's saying I'm not playing games here. I'm speaking to you honestly and openly. So let's put it down this way. We'll talk about it and try to learn how it fits into the whole of what he's trying to argue for here. Number one on your worksheet. We need to speak, let's put it this way, sincerely and then I'm going to add this phrase, and strategic words. "We Need to Speak Sincere and Strategic Words." And I'll add the words "and strategic" because I think the context is going to certainly validate my use of those two words. Everything about Paul's communication in Second Corinthians has clearly been strategic. Because if I said no, just speak your mind, right? If I'm speaking freely from the heart, if I said every time I see you I'm just going to speak freely from the heart which is the center of the seat, the cockpit of my emotions, my thinking, my volition. That would not be wise. It would not be in concert with the book of Proverbs. If I said, you know when you come together as Christians in church, or you go to your small groups or you do your ministry at church, just speak whatever's on your mind. Just speak freely. No muzzle, no restraint. Would you think that comports with anything in Scripture? No, of course not. So we need to add this phrase "and strategic words,"



because everything that Paul has said to the Corinthians has been very strategic, and certainly the Bible would argue at large for strategy.

Let me prove it to you. You've written it down. Let's think about knowing the kinds of words we need to enlist. And you should always say what words are needed certainly as we're trying to build unity, warmth, connection, relationship, family in the church. What words do we need? Great. Go to Ephesians Chapter 4 with me. Let's spend a little bit of time here. Ephesians Chapter 4 drop down near the end of the chapter. Ephesians Chapter 4. Now he's dealing with a lot of different things here in this section of Scripture. But as he settles into the end of this chapter, I think you'll see all of these tie together as a theme that we're really addressing here. And the key is this kind of good, strategic, sincere talk. And he starts with the adverse. He starts with the opposite. Verse 29, here's the command, "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth." Now this particular description, corrupting, is not a bad way to translate it because it may look more adjectival to have this word which if you study this or you click on it you get your software out or whatever, you can say, okay, this is a Greek word "Rhyparos" and it means something filthy, something stinky, something rotten. And you could say, okay, I'm going to quote this verse to my pre-teen because he started to use some foul language, so I'm going to quote this verse. Does it apply? I guess so, but that's not really the point of this particular passage. Yeah, you shouldn't use foul language or even the word "foul," it kind of deals with the concept of rhyparos, but you can see in the next phrase, that's why it's translated as a participle here, I think that's not a bad way to say it because of the next phrase in the opposite, instead of using rhyparos or stinkier or foul words, it's really about words, only such words that are good FOR something, good FOR building up. So it's not just that the words are stinky, it's that they have a stinky effect. They have a bad effect. That the bad words that we could use in our conversations with each other do the opposite of what the next phrase says, and that is to build us up.

Now, remember a few weeks ago I think I was doing announcements or something. I came up and I talked about the fact that some of the main analogies of the body of Christ in the New Testament are we are sheep and we have a shepherd, right? Or we are members parts of a body and we have a head, right? Jesus Christ at the head, or we are bricks or stones and Christ is the cornerstone. Do you remember when I said that if you were around then? All three of those analogies applied to the body of Christ. Now, this phrase right here, "only such as is good for building up." Old translations used to call it to edify. Sometimes we still use that phrase in a biblical context. You talk about the edifying speech. Edifying. Edifying is the word to build up. I like this translation better because we don't use that word outside of church very often. Edify like an edifice is a building. To edify is to build that building up. Well, that really does smack back to what he says. And he's already said in Ephesians is that we are a building and the stones are all coming together, Christ is the cornerstone, the apostles and prophets are the foundation, and we are now being placed into this thing, coming into this building where God dwells like a temple.

Okay, that picture here is my words need to be good for "building up." It needs to help this structure "as it fits the occasion," so be thoughtful, be strategic, "that it may give grace to those who hear." Even that idea is so good. It's like grace becomes the mortar. It becomes



the thing that sticks these bricks together. And so that's very strategic. This is a call for very strategic phrases and words. It's not just speaking my mind, but the mind part of it, the heart of it is that I'm speaking sincerely. I don't want to flatter people. I'm not just out saying silly things that I don't really mean. I've got to speak sincere words from my heart but they need to be selectively strategic so I'm saying words that are going to pull us together, not rhyparos words or stinky words or rotten words that pull us apart. Because that really is where this all starts in the church, right? When things go bad it's because usually what people have said. A lot of times we can get over what people have done sometimes, it's the words that surround what is done. So we have to be careful about our words.

Now read the next verse, verse 30, which I'm trying to make the case this all fits into the theme of all these verses that harken back to the great high priestly prayer of John 17. And that is the whole point of us getting together, having the glue of grace sticking us together, being unified in one, and harmonious like a building, we all fit together like a puzzle piece, it's all good, is that when it's done right it brings glory to God. It is the thing that announces to the world we're not just a hobby club here. We're not just, you know, a theology club. We are the body of Christ. God has changed us and the Spirit draws us together. If we don't have the right words, if we don't use the right kind of fitting, strategic, gracious words, well, then we're going to grieve the Spirit. That's why the word "and" is at the beginning of this, right? Verse 30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

So, I'm now in relationship with the Holy Spirit. It would be grievous to the Holy Spirit if my conversations with you are such that I'm pulling us apart instead of pulling us together. So I got to think that way. And your words are so powerful in this regard. And I'm going to prove it to you again I think in verses 31 and 32. The concepts here relate to the building up of the body together. Look at verse 31, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you." Those are things that end up coming out of our mouths and in our flesh I might feel that but I can't have that. I have to put that away "along with all malice." That's the underlying stuff in the church where a lot of people are so checked out of the relationships, that's just how it works. Instead, I have to be kind to one another. And Paul's arguing for this tenderhearted, it has to be real, honest, sincere, tenderhearted, forgiving one another because there may be times when something you have done has bothered me. But I'm "forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore," keep reading, Chapter 5 verse 1, "be imitators of God."

Well, how is that? "As beloved children." Okay, so that adds another phrase in the sense that God loves me, I'm his child and guess what? You're his child. I think we still have the same theme going on. I have to "walk in love, as Christ," the second person of the Godhead, "loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." And again, this gets back to what does it do in God's mind when I'm doing the right things like not being bitter, not being angry, being kind, tenderhearted, forgiving each other. I'm doing what God did because Jesus himself had to look at Thomas and Nathaniel and Philip and Peter and James and John and oftentimes you know he's like how long must I put up with you? And yet he's going to lean into this and he's going to be gracious and kind and forgiving and long-suffering and all the



things that make him continue to be someone that the Father is pleased with. And so we need to aim for the same kind of thing. What I want to warn you of is leaving the relationships before you leave the church. Because you will leave the church if you leave the relationships in your own heart. And the way you keep this going for a period of time is you getting all the platitudes in place, saying all the niceties, saying all the things that a lot of people say to kind of keep the appearance of this thing going. But in fact, you're checked out, you're angry, you're bitter, you're frustrated, and it may percolate under the surface and you may be polite, but it's not warm. You may be nice, right? But you're not on the same page. We need to work through that.

Paul is appealing for that in these three verses. And the first word is I want honest communication and a kind of communication that clearly is in the context of Second Corinthians which is a kind of communication he explains here in Ephesians Chapters 4 and 5. The niceties that keep distance we can see all throughout the Bible. Let me give you some examples. How about David and Absalom in Second Samuel 13? If you're a Sunday school grad, you might remember the problem between Absalom and David really started when Tamar was raped by Amnon. And when this terrible tragedy took place in the family, what happens is Absalom is infuriated by it, as he should have been. And David, it says in that passage... Now here's a very telling statement in Second Samuel Chapter 13, starts in verse 20. And it says in that passage that when David hears of this and Absalom is fuming over this, it says they came together, lived under the same roof for two full years. I mean, the prophet is trying to tell us this kind of went on as they passed each other in the courtyard of the king's palace, and it was never discussed and never dealt with. And as you kind of lay out what continues to happen in David's chronicles, you realize this was a problem. And in that sense, there were niceties. You can only imagine how father and son talked. But in reality, their hearts grew further and further apart. It would end in a whole just full-blown coup d'état, with David being sent out of Jerusalem and Absalom taking over but it all starts here. It starts here with animosity that is never dealt with. There is no appeal like Paul is making to the Corinthians we have to deal with this. And David didn't deal with it and he probably should have, he should have dealt with it. And Absalom is fuming but he doesn't even approach dad. There's no mention of that. This is just two people deciding to be nice to each other for 24 months, and it's just an eruption waiting to happen. Just like people in our church who get offended, they get frustrated and here's the reality, it's just a matter of time till they leave the church, because they've already checked out of the relationships and they're carrying around bitterness in their own hearts and it needs to stop. What we need is to have some conversation.

Think about Joseph and his brothers in Genesis Chapter 37. Joseph, of course, is the favored child in so many ways. God in particular places his hand upon Joseph and it would be Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. He would be the key guy in this lineage. He just ends up being the one with all the things that happen, even in the favor with mom and dad, that his brothers have this kind of envy about their brother. And how did that go? Well, it didn't end well, but how did it go when they had this, right? They had this kind of I can only assume they're kind of just covering for their frustration with each other. And the niceties of it all continued but it was never really dealt with. There was never a let's fix this. There was never



let's return to the warmth of what it should be to be brothers, even though this thing has kind of gotten us off track, and instead it was just a matter of time until they're taking money and selling their brother into slavery when some of the brothers wanted to have him killed. Right? This is a terrible situation that explodes on the scene in the pages of the book of Genesis, but it starts with really undealt with animosity toward people in one family.

How about Luke 15? I know it's just a parable, not just the parable, it's a parable of Christ. And he tells this story of the father and an older brother of a son that you know of as the prodigal son, the lost son. After telling the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and now the lost son. And though it's just a story, and by that I mean it's not a historical event, you just need to recognize what it's like to have two people in this story identified, which really are the identification of Jesus and the Pharisees who were mad about Jesus' ministry to the people who were turning to Christ who were, you know, the tax collectors and the sinners. But here's the reality. They were sitting there with their niceties in the household. Just imagine, fill in some blanks. And the father would go out on the porch and wait for his lost son to come home and repent. He was longing for this, and it was all played out when he actually came down the long driveway, so to speak, and he ran to get him and he embraced him and said get the ring, get the shoes and all that. And the older brother had a completely different picture of all this. The older brother had resentment and hostility in his heart.

So here's dad and older brother, dad and son, they're living in the same house, let's just imagine this, and I'm sure there is plenty of hey, dad, how's it going? Hey, son, how are you? A lot of that was going on but they were not on the same page. And in reality, it explodes into the problem that he's trying to address in verse 1 of Chapter 15. And that is the hostility between the Pharisees and Christ, and it needed to be dealt with. That's why Jesus was telling the story because he was dealing with the problem. And so it is that it needs to be dealt with, not with pride, but with the kind of humility that says we're the body of Christ, this only pleases God when we can use strategic and sincere, loving words to fix this problem.

What kind of words? Go to Proverbs 16 real quick before we leave this first point and show you a great text. And it really should start, I mentioned pride and humility, let's start in verse 18, "Pride goes before destruction," this is Proverbs Chapter 16 verse 18, "and a haughty spirit before a fall." And I'm telling you, the thing that keeps these kinds of tensions and animosities happening, even though you may be nice, you don't cuss anybody out in the lobby of the church, it is pride, it's a haughty spirit. "Better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than divide the spoil with the proud." And there is a lot of dividing of spoils in people's conversation behind the back of the person that they don't like. But "whoever gives thought to the word will discover good." The "word" you can see even in a footnote in the English Standard Version, maybe the "matter at hand," but I think even more so and the translation is probably a good one, the instructions of God, right? We need to know what the instructions of God are. And from our perspective in the New Testament, it's that we are getting along with those people, and we're making sure that we are together as the body of Christ in harmonious relationship. "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord." Of course, we ought to hope that God will help us through whatever barriers we have to be connected.



Well, how do we go about it? Verse 21, "The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness." See, this is what we need, a kind of sincere and strategic, and you can add this word now to it, sweet kind of persuasion in our voice to fix it. That would have been good for Absalom and David. That would have been good for Joseph and Reuben. That would have been good certainly for the father and the elder brother in Luke Chapter 15. I love this phrase, verse 22, "Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it." That's a great phrase, by the way, in the book of Hebrews. This is great. If you can just approach these things with good sense it will bring life to you. "But the instruction of fools is folly," and there are plenty of fools who are giving you instruction about how to deal with people you don't like.

Verse 23, "The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips." Give some thought to how you have these conversations, how you're going to increase love between people who you should be close to within your church. Verse 24, "Gracious words," man, it can hit, "are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body." What does that do to bring people together as opposed to just reacting? "There is a way that seems right to a man," verse 25, "but its end is the way to death." Stop reacting with your words. Be more judicious. Be more persuasive. Or to use the words I gave you in this point, be strategic and sincere with a goal that you know is to try and please God with the kind of unity and harmony and warmth we should have in the church. And some of you listening to me today I'm sure you don't spend much time with your church, right? And again, that's not the way it's supposed to be. This is supposed to be your number one set of relationships right here in the body of Christ. And we need to invest in this and make sure that niceties and politeness don't keep distance but our words are glue that brings us together.

Back to our text, verse 12. Paul said, "we have spoken freely to you ... our hearts are open." This is sincere conversation, context, strategic conversation. He says, "you're not restricted by us," we're not trying to shut you down, "but you are restricted in your own splankhnon, in your own affections," in your own warmth toward us. You're not being warm toward us and you ought to be. Okay, let's think about this because there are two words often used, "love" and "affection" or "agape" if you want to use that word, "Phileo," you can use that word too if you'd like. But the word "love" in the Greek New Testament and the word splankhnon, affection or compassion. I want to show how these go together but let's give it a heading. Number two. "Love Generously Without Conditions." I think that's a good picture of real love that moves into splankhnon, moves into affection, moves into compassion because they do go together. But it starts first with the heart, not with the gut. It starts first with the thought and the decision and the priority, not with the feelings.

See, the world is all about feelings. Jot this down if you need to. First John Chapter 2 verse 15. How does the world decide what it's going to be engaged with? It's "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life." In other words, if it makes my flesh feel something, if it makes my eyes feel attracted to it, and if it's going to make my ego get boosted, well, then I'm all about that. That's not how it works in the body of Christ. It's not supposed to work that way. I need to make a decision to love the people whom God loves. As Paul said in Acts 20, here are people whom God gave his Son's blood for. Purchased them



with his own blood. So those are people I have to decide now they're going to be my object of love. And love is not the feelings, splankhnon. We'll get to the feeling. But it starts with the decision of the heart, which is not my seat of emotions, but the seat of my thinking and decision-making priority.

So you need to make the decision to love. And what is love? Let's define it biblically. If it's not a feeling because either the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or the boast of pride of life has drawn me to you, then what is it? It has to be a decision that I make. What kind of decision is biblical love? Well, just think about it. All throughout the Bible biblical love is defined by Christ himself, that he would see us in need and lay down his life for us. Or to start with the Father, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son." And the point is, let's just put it this way, love biblically in our minds is the people in my church, the people who I fellowship with in my local body of Christ, these are the people I'm deciding to say my life needs to be a blessing to them. My life needs to be committed to their good. My life needs to be committed to their well-being. That's where it starts. It always starts with that decision to say I am choosing to make these people the priority. Should you be good to all people? Sure. Galatians Chapter 6 says be "good to everybody, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." And this is your household of faith, right? This is your church. And if this is your church, you need to say, I'm making the decision to be committed to the good of the people in the church. And so that's a decision to love. And that love, by the way, in the Bible is always generous love. And that generous love is going to immediately bleed into the thing that he mentions in verse 12, splankhnon, and let me prove it to you. Let me show you some passages.

How about this, Philippians Chapter 1 verse 7. Let's go there. We'll look at verses 7, 8 and 9, Philippians Chapter 1. You'll see right out of the gate in the first phrase of this he's talking about his feelings. He said, "it is right for me to feel this way about you all." Well, what are we talking about? Well, we are going to get into the feeling in a minute because there's a very important word stuck in the middle of verse 8. But he talked initially in verse 6 about the fact that he knows "that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ." That has to do not only with their commitments to him but ultimately God's commitment to them, and the point that they're in Christ the way he's in Christ. And he says that in the next phrase, "because I hold you in my heart, for you're all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment," you care about me in prison, "and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel." I hold you in my heart. Now again, that word translated kardia into "heart" in English we think seat of emotions. That's not the seat of emotion. That's him saying, "I hold you in my heart."

Now the feeling is going to come from holding you in my heart. But it doesn't start with that. That's why the commitment that you make to your church can't be out of sight, out of mind. The people at your church need to be in your mind always to hold them in your heart. You need to pray for them. You need to prioritize them. You need to think about them. You need to call them. You need to text them. You need to be a part of the people in your church. That's why it needs to be more than just a Sunday morning experience. And the reality of this is that as I hold them in my heart because I know we share in this thing, verse 6 says that I know I'm on the same path they are, God's going to bring me into his kingdom. I also share in the fact



that we are all about the advancement of the gospel, "the defense and confirmation of the gospel," then he says this: here comes the feelings, verse 8, "For God is my witness, how I yearn," that's a strong feeling here, long "for you all with the," what's the next word in English? "Affection." That's the word *splankhnon*, there it is again, the affection, the compassion, the deep feelings, the warmth "of Christ Jesus."

Now, does Christ have warmth toward us? Of course he does. And it starts with a decision to love us and meet our needs. And then it's all about the fact that from that springs this great word, compassion, affection, *splankhnon*. And he says I know I can attest to this, it is right for me to feel the way I do about you and we're all about the same thing. I hold you in my heart. You're in my mind. You're in my priority. But here's the deal. God knows how this has grown into this and it's right that it does. "How I yearn for you all with the *splankhnon* of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love," your *agape*, "may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." The love that we have for each other that drives itself into *splankhnon*, the warmth, unbridled, not restricted warmth. All of that here is going to bring glory to God. It all goes back to John Chapter 17, John Chapter 13. The world is going to know, I'm going to be glorified, the Father is going to be glorified. This is a good thing, and it needs to be a priority first in my heart. It needs to be allowed to be unfettered in my affections and my *splankhnon*, and it will always be the thing that God is going to move us to be increasingly invested in. The whole generosity of biblical love.

Let me give you two passages to contrast with that idea. Turn with me really quickly to First John Chapter 3. Then I'll turn you to Luke Chapter 6 if you're still with me. First John Chapter 3. Now, I quote this often, but we haven't looked at it lately so let's turn to it. First John Chapter 3 verse 16, which reminds us of John 3:16. But here's First John 3:16, "By this we know love." How do we know what *agape* is? How do we know what love is? Well, it expresses itself in some massively generous things. "He laid down his life for us." Okay. We were sinners. We were going to hell. God said, I can prevent hell here if I send my Son to be sin for them, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." So yes, Christ is going to go and pay that penalty. So it says, "and we ought to," now follow that pattern, "lay down our lives for the brothers." Well, I'm not going to be crucified on a cross for my brothers, it would do no good. But he gets practical. Here's what I'm talking about. Verse 17, "But if anyone has the world's good and sees his brother in need, yet closes his," what's the next English word in your sentence? "Heart." It's not the word *kardia*. Guess what the word is. *Splankhnon*. *Splankhnon*, right? Closes his compassion, his affection against him.

Now, the reason the translators translated "heart," I'm only guessing here because I don't know who was involved in the committee of this particular book, this particular section of Scripture. But I got to think because in Western America we still think of the heart as something on Valentine's Day that has warmth and affection attached to it. But it really is *splankhnon* and no one's going to translate it "guts" or "intestines," I get that. But the idea of this affection or compassion you could have put here, if you close your affection toward this person. But that's the idea, right? It's that you now if you love someone the way Christ loved



us, which is the decision to be a blessing, to meet their need, to go the extra mile as I like to say, stay the extra hour, or spend the extra dollar, I'm going to care for them, prioritize them, keep them, hold them in my heart. Prioritize them. Pray for them. These are my people whom I'm supposed to love and care for. Then the splankhnon grows out of that and when I see them in a need, well, it's just natural that this generous love would be motivated not just by "I ought to do it, I'm a robot, I ought to do it," but my heart is going to be entangled in this, splankhnon is going to be there, and I can't close that splankhnon. It's going to be unfettered, right? It's not going to be restricted. I can't restrict my compassion, my splankhnon toward them but I'm going to let it out. Because if I don't let that out, "how does God's love," agape, "abide in him?" And that's the point. How can I say that God is active in our hearts to change our lives and give us the kind of love for each other the way God has loved me, how can I say that if there's never that kind of generosity that comes from a decision to put your needs before my own that then grows into this splankhnon, that then is unfettered and unrestricted. If you restrict it where's the love of God in you? Because that's what love asks for, is for your affections to be unrestricted, to actually move you to doing whatever it might be. And that's why he says, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk." People can do that in an intellectual way, but splankhnon it's going to drive us in that generous act, "in deed and in truth."

And here's something for you. Verse 19, "By this we know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him." By this we know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him. Let me say that really clearly in the book of First John. A lot of the things in First John are about you knowing that you're really a Christian. And a lot of us gravitate immediately onto the obedience parts. Obedient, this obedience that, not continue in sin the way I did before, but you realize a big portion of First John is about do you love your brother? And the whole point of that I'm trying to draw out of the text that we're preaching on this morning in Second Corinthians Chapter 6, is you better be able to feel the splankhnon for people who you've already held as a priority to say, I'm going to make them the priority to care for them. And if you feel that and then you act on that and you see yourself not restricting your affection toward them and you actually meet their needs, then guess what? You should stand back and say, yeah, I can see I'm a Christian. Look at what God's done in my heart. Because we're not just a club that circles around our shared interest in theology or God or whatever. This is God regenerating our hearts. So much of the book of First John is about how you'll know you're a Christian if you really love your brother. And really this is what has gotten into some of the details of what that means in this sermon.

Now, I said it's going to be different than the world. I say without conditions. I said, I'd take you to Luke Chapter 6. So let's go there really quickly. Luke Chapter 6. Drop down to verse 32. He's going to talk to his followers and say I know that you think you can have this kind of love, but it's just a kind of love that really is with conditions because that's the way the rest of the world works. And that may be comfortable for you but it's not biblical love, because biblical love is going to be that kind of love that is involving splankhnon, involving affection, and it's not going to be restricted, and it's going to lead to you never caring about, hey, I can't believe I sacrificed for you this week and you didn't sacrifice for me. You're not going to think about that because you're going to have a different kind of love that comes from God. Look at verse



32, "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you?" In other words what credit is that? Is God impressed with that? Do you think you're impressed with yourself because you love people who love you? "For even sinners love those who love them." That's why if you come to church and it's really just about you loving the people who you just enjoy loving and that's all that is, I like these guys, these are my kind of people. You might as well be in a country club or in a bowling league or something, because the same thing is going to happen there. You just gravitate toward the people who, you know, you kind of would gravitate toward. You love those who love you and you have common interests or whatever. And then you find maybe a really nice guy who does good things for you and so you do good to them. Verse 33, "If you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you?" What credit is that? Is that any special kind of love, "even sinners do the same." Or let's really talk about idolatry here, your wallet. "If you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount."

See, the whole point is this: if it's a quid pro quo, if it's a keeping score, as is put in First Corinthians Chapter 13, and the New International Version translates it this way. It's a bit of an interpretive translation, but love keeps no record of wrongs. So the word in the text is resentment, right? It does not resent, and that means it doesn't keep track of the fact that you did this, but then you didn't do that. It's almost like an anger over what you didn't do. That's resentment. And in this case that's not how Christians work. Real biblical love doesn't do that. And he says that's how non-Christians work. They're going to keep track of stuff like this. Now, I don't want you to think about your fellow churchgoers as enemies, but it makes the point in an extreme way in verse 35, "but love your enemies." What does that mean? Someone who may not love you, may not do good to you, may not give to you. "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." That's the key phrase even at church among your fellow believers. Expect nothing in return. That's the kind of "without conditions" clause that I'm trying to tease out here. "And your reward will be great." And your reward will be great. If you can learn to love like that, I don't expect anything back. Why? Because then you're really hitting on the core element of biblical love, of divine love, of God's love. Then "you will be sons of the Most High." Why? Because that's how he loves. "He is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father's merciful." That's the kind of love God expects us to share toward the people we go to church with, right? And this should be how we think. Should it extend all the way to our enemies? Of course. But we're going to start here with the thing that should be most pertinent and most urgent for us. How are your relationships here with the people who are your fellow bricks, your fellow sheep, your fellow members of this same body? We ought to love generously without conditions.

Verse 13, back to our text, Second Corinthians Chapter 6 verse 13. "In return (I speak to you as children) widen your hearts also." Now I told you the word "hearts" is not there. I think it's going to include both your gut and your heart. Sorry. Both your affections and your prioritizing. Your commitment, your resolve. So open up. That's what he wants. Widen. That's really what the text is, widen. And he wants that because they're being restricted so you have to open up. That sounds very risky. But you have to do that. And this is the appeal that he makes. And so I just want to mimic the Apostle Paul by having you do the same. Let's put it this way. Number three, "Appeal for a Loving Unity that Pleases Christ." Appeal for that. It would have been



great in the stories that I just quickly threw out there if David and Absalom would have gotten to that place, if Reuben and his brothers and Joseph would have gotten to that place. If the elder brother of the prodigal and the father would have gotten to that place, that would have been good. And for Joseph's credit, let's just put it this way by Genesis 45 that's exactly what he does. There's that great little phrase where it says he called his brothers near and he wept on Benjamin's shoulder and he brought them in, even tried to spare them the shame of the Egyptians to try and care for them. And they didn't even believe it. By the end of the book, they're like, oh, we were sure that he's going to take vengeance on us. I mean, he is trying to make an appeal for unity, now not the kind of unity that pleases Christ because that's anachronistic. But the idea, of course, is it certainly pleases God to have that kind of acceptance and reconciliation. We need an appeal like that that's going to be more than agreement.

One last passage I want to turn you to just as a cross reference. Colossians Chapter 3. Colossians Chapter 3. I don't want you just to say, as so many people in church do, well, we'll just agree, because that gets us back to the first sub-point and that is niceties can keep us apart. There has to be a genuine widening of our hearts and our affections to these people. That's what's being argued for here in Colossians Chapter 3. Start in verse 11. Think about this. He's talking about the church now in Colossae. "Here there is no Greek and Jew." Now how different are the Greeks from the Jews in the first century? Major. The circumcised and the uncircumcised are a big deal in terms of ceremonial law. Or how about this? Put next to that, the "barbarian, Scythian," or the Roman or the Greek, or whoever you want to talk about, or the "slave, free." How different are they? Radically different. "But Christ is all, and in all." That's what matters. See, in clubs the other things matter. What are your backgrounds? What are your values? What do you do? What's your economic socio whatever? But for us, it's "Christ is all, and in all."

So we have to "put on" and then this parenthetical statement, "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved." Think about how much he loves us. Christ is in us. Well, we have to put on this "compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against the other, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive." Think about that statement. That's far more than saying, can you just get along with people in your church? Or maybe like in your family when you were a kid, just get along with your sister. Would you just get along with her? That's not what God's asking for here. It doesn't matter how different you are than the people you go to church with as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved by God, by Christ. Compassion. Kindness. Humility. Meekness. Patience. Bear with each other. I know sometimes it may be hard in your flesh to do that. If you have a complaint, can you just let it go? "Aphiēmi" is a great Greek word that translates "forgiveness" in this text. Just drop it. Can you let it go? "It is his glory to overlook an offense." Just let it go. "And above all these put on agape, put on love." I love this because just the idea of widening "which binds everything together in," here it is reminiscent of John 17, "in perfect harmony," just like Jesus said, I wanted to be "perfectly one." You've got to be committed to this thing called love, which spills into splankhnon and an affection and compassion. And then you know what? "The peace of Christ can rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body," right? All of you should have peace not only in your



hearts with Christ but with each other. "And be thankful." What a great text. It's more than an agreement. It's more than getting along. And I hope that's a bit of a conviction to us.

Paul was caught between Philemon and Onesimus, and maybe you're caught watching as a third party between two of your friends. He doesn't bark at Philemon, but he says, you know, "for love's sake I ... appeal to you." Just know this thing that should be so central to what God has called us to. To accept Onesimus back, would you? Because you want to talk about slaves and free will? He was your slave. Now, can you just bring him back as a brother? Make the appeal.

All this binding and stretching and widening made me think of my drawer where I have a little container, I have one of paperclips, and I have one of rubber bands. And I think to myself, you know, if I'm a rubber band sitting in Pastor Mike's desk, when Pastor Mike opens the drawer, the lights come on and the big fingers come to reach for a rubber band, I'm thinking don't choose me. Think about the poor rubber band's life. The only way for a rubber band to work is to have me take out that rubber band and to stretch it. That just can't be a comfortable experience, just personifying my rubber bands in my desk drawer. But if it sits in a desk drawer comfortably it's really not fulfilling its purpose now is it? So we have to stretch ourselves. I like the verb. It's the only imperative verb in our text in verse 13, we have to widen ourselves, stretch ourselves, because that's literally what the text says. We can supply the heart and splanknon but stretch yourself. And for you it may be stretching your patience, your kindness, your time, your energy, your mercy, your conversation, your humility. Whatever it is, you have to stretch yourself. And you have to say, you know, when I stretch myself the way God intends me to do it can bind us together. Just like a good rubber band, pulling Christians close. No more niceties and politeness, but we get down to the place and we say, listen, we look past the disagreements and we draw each other close the way that God intends. I hope that's your commitment. It ought to be. And we can please Christ and glorify him as we do it. Let's close in a word of prayer in service today.

Pray with me please. God, this is a high calling for us and not an easy one in our unredeemed body state. We struggle with our flesh. God, we pray that you would give us a great sense of your presence here in our lives as we seek to do what you asked us to do to please you in this work. So, God, today, wherever the conviction might lie, I pray that you drive us to real action with end the keeping of score, we would seek to please you the way you have pleased the Father, Jesus, by coming and taking on the challenge of not only putting up with that first century generation of followers, but putting up with us even today into the 21st century. How you have forgiven us and accepted us and you borne with us. You've been patient toward us. You've been merciful toward us. And help us to reflect that, please, in our Christian lives. I pray we take this to heart. May this be fleshed out, worked out, applied in our small group discussions, even as we work through on our own the questions on the back of the worksheet this week. Help us to put this into practice in a way that honors you and encourages your heart in some way. God, let it bring glory to you.

In Jesus' name. Amen.