

# UNITY



## The Way of Business

Spring, 2022

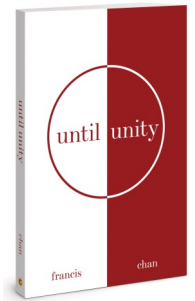
Carl Tompkins, President

# UNITY

## Reporting on the Necessity of Unity and How to Attain It

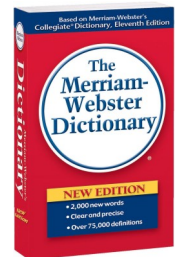
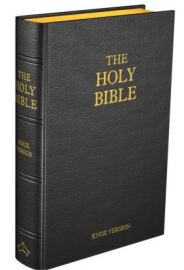
### Introduction

I appreciate this opportunity to share one of the most vital subjects from scripture and that subject is unity. For the past fourteen years much of my effort, within The Way of Business ministry, has been to secure unity amongst many groups and organizations within our community, so I was very pleased with the opportunity to read Francis Chan's most recent book *Until Unity* that confirmed many of my beliefs while adding a number of additional considerations to this important subject as it pertains to the life that we've been instructed to live as followers of Christ.



### Definition

Right up front, it's beneficial to understand the definition of unity. Biblically, Romans 15:5-7 spells out that our spirit of unity is demonstrated by us glorifying the Lord with one heart and one mouth and that we are to accept one another just as Christ has accepted us. Ephesians 5:30 tells us, after all, believers are members of His body, the church. Philippians 2: 1-2 states that if we are to have any encouragement from unity with Christ we must be like-minded, having the same love and being of one spirit and purpose. Jesus provides the best summary of unity's definition in John 17:22 when He prayed that we would be one just as He and His Father are one. Even the world helps us understand the value of unity where Webster's Dictionary states that unity is the element of an identity, a harmony, and one accord. Furthermore, unity is the power of effect based upon singleness and a body of mutual appreciation.



### The Necessity of Unity

Mr. Chan's book motivated me into further research on the critical nature of unity within the Bible, and it can easily be argued that, beyond our salvation through Christ, unity is the most important theme throughout all sixty-six books of scripture. Focusing on two scriptures of major significance, the first comes with Christ's final instruction to us prior to His ascension, as stated in Matthew 28:18-20: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." This commission instructs us into action to bring the word of salvation to all mankind and then teach people how to live their life in a manner that glorifies Christ. The second scripture is John 17:23 where Jesus prays to His Father: *May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.* In combined form we realize that this verse is key in order that we can fulfill the Great Commission. One can easily deduce that absent unity, the world will not know who Jesus is, His origin nor the love that God holds for all mankind. Need more be said concerning the critical nature of our unity?

## Our Achievement in Attaining and Maintaining Unity

As we consider our progress on attaining and maintaining unity it's interesting to recognize that the church began in a fully united manner and remained so for 1054 years. Yes, there were squabbles amongst church members from the very beginning but the church held it together for over one-thousand years. The first church split, historically referred to as the Great Schism, occurred in 1054 when the body of western Latin Christians had theological differences with the eastern Greek Christians thus establishing the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. The barriers of difference started over the preferred language use of Latin verses Greek. From there the perceived divine nature of Christ became a hurdle followed by issues surrounding the subjects of fasting, celibacy, possession of the Holy Spirit and the taking of communion. Since that time, nearly one-thousand years later, we've arrived at over 45,000 Christian church denominations, based on the 2014 survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at the Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Such a statistic indicates man's propensity to divide and separate from others when they come to hold a belief of superiority over others who disagree with their doctrine and ideologies. While those who led in the crusade of church division felt correct in their actions, even righteous, there is not one ounce of God within such actions. As Francis Chan states in *Until Unity*, anything that divides the followers of Christ is "disgusting" to the Lord.

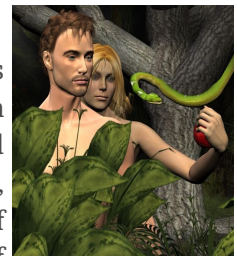


### What Most Often Divides Us Means Nothing to the Lord

It's common for people to develop their own unique set of core beliefs based upon experience, environment, and training. And for those who claim Christianity as their religion, many beliefs will revolve around what they have come to consider as important in being right with the Lord. Examples of such religious beliefs could pertain to what day of the week is recognized as the sabbath, the concept of baptism, what food to eat, the role of deeds, how to pray, and many more. Author of *One Lord, One Faith*, Rex Koivisto, refers to such subjects as being sectarian in nature, meaning the narrowing of acceptable Christian fellowship and cooperation due to a broadening of what is considered orthodox doctrine. In other words, subjects of value invented by man that are far removed from the core requirements dictated by Christ for salvation and proper worship. Koivisto goes on to claim that such beliefs are a plague that has damaged the church and Christian individuals alike. The result is disunity with the damage being an absence of love.

### By Observation

I have witnessed many forms of disunity in the church; many going as far as teaching their congregates how their doctrine must be followed in order to attain salvation. One series of classes offered by one specific church denomination listed the reasons why the Seventh Day Adventists, Salvation Army, Christian Science, LDS Church, and Catholics were bound for hell. Satan not only enjoys such steps of disunity, but he also greatly benefits from it. He demonstrated this form of enjoyment when he convinced Adam and Eve to separate themselves from God; to distrust Him and go their own way. Such competition amongst our many denominations is largely why the world distrusts the church.



## What Scripture Instructs us to Hold in Common

What must be said is that there are eight specific instructions within scripture that define false teachers by what they believe and teach, and these eight instructions do represent those subjects that we are to avoid in order to be true to God's way. False teachers are those who preach a different gospel (Gal 1:8) or claim to be Christ (Mt 24:5); they are those who say Christ is accursed (1Co 12:3); they are those who judge people over the foods they eat and festivals they celebrate, requiring harsh bodily discipline as a means of attaining godliness (Col 2:16-23); false teachers are those who get caught up in myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculation (1Ti 1:4); false teachers forbid marriage and certain foods (1Ti 4:3); they deny Jesus came in the flesh (1Jn 4:1-3); and false teachers turn the grace of God into sensuality (Jude 4). Beyond these practices of false teachers most all remaining doctrine, ideologies, attitudes, and beliefs don't eliminate our ability to be right with Christ. In fact, by scripture, such beliefs are fine for individuals to hold onto for themselves but should not become the measurement of judging others. Apostle Paul is very specific to this notion in Romans 14:19-23 when, by summary, he states *"The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Whoever thus serves Christ, is acceptable to God and approved by men. So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding."* So, consider what thoughts you've had, words you've spoken, and actions taken that judge others as being less than yourself. Sadly, when such judgements result, we arrive at the belief that those who disagree with us are those people we no longer need in our lives, and we become more exclusive in who we choose to associate; the church is divided.

## What We Miss Because of what We have Missed

Looking to remedy this situation and get back on the track of unity for the sake of making disciples of all nations, we need not look any farther than the Holy Spirit. Too often, we have made doctrine the crux of our evaluation of other believers over and above the presence of the Holy Spirit. By scripture we all have been promised the Holy Spirit upon our acceptance of Christ as Savior, but this doesn't mean that we'll automatically be led by the Holy Spirit. Being filled and led by the Holy Spirit is a discipline of submission empowered by humility. The startling fact is that there would be no disunity if the 2.5 billion claimed-to-be-Christians of the world were fully filled and fully led by one common Holy Spirit. We miss unity by missing the Holy Spirit! Again, referencing Francis Chan in his book *Until Unity*, most all disunity results from our intellect that is supported by our pride. People love to thank God for how smart they've become and pray for His blessing as they work hard to live out the principles of life that they believe are important, and God help those who get in their way! Such a life is one that seldom has experienced the Holy Spirit. Author Bruce Witt states in his book *There is Only One Leader and You are Not It* that God is not interested in what you think that you can do for Him, but, rather, what He can do through you. We must be emptied of ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit and do everything that He says is best, and remember, play no games here thinking that you can get away with doing it your way and calling it His! We'll be known by our fruit. Our role, as defined in Ephesians 4: 1-3, we are to *"walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* Applying our God-given intellect and talent within this governing framework allows us to do everything God's way while utilizing those gifts that God has granted!

## Step One of the Remedy for Unity

To get God's intended unity back on track and be led by the Holy Spirit we first need to fall face down in repentance, seek Christ's forgiveness, dedicate our entire self to the Holy Spirit's indwelling, and submit to His counsel in how to get things done. And the best news is that we'll know when this is being accomplished because no one leaves the table! Our ability to persist will be driven by our new freshness of life, a higher degree of peace, joy, rest, assurance, confidence, and complete love for everyone. Might you imagine the sphere of influence that 2.5 billion Christians would have on the fallen world if we commonly held these attributes secured by the Holy Spirit? By our earlier stated definition of unity, the united Kingdom of Christ would be the identity of power within our broken world based upon our body of singleness and mutual appreciation.

## Step Two of the Remedy for Unity

The next step in securing unity comes from the book of fiction but great spiritual principles, *The Shack*, where author William P. Young reminds us of our required need to remember that we were created to be relational and not individual. The story that William shares is when Mack, the main character of the book, witnesses a discussion going on between God, who carries the name Papa, the Holy Spirit who is referred to as Sarayu, and Jesus. It's a difficult discussion that revolves around the reconciliation of an estranged family. What captured Mack's attention wasn't what they were talking about, but how they related. Mack expected Papa to assert His position of authority, taking charge, and determining the final course of action. As he shared his observations with Jesus, Jesus summarized Mack's observations and feelings by asking, "So you expected us to follow the chain of command?" "Exactly," stated Mack. We now learn a key lesson in unity by what Jesus then said: "Papa, Sarayu and I are bound relationally, and we each live by the principle that relationships are built and maintained when each of us think of the other two being much more important than we are. Sadly, the world has eroded into hierarchies that require rules to protect and administer such. People end up with a chain of command or order that destroys relationships. Hierarchies cause mankind to miss the wonder of relationships that we intended." So when we live by such a relational model there is no possible way for people to become alienated with one another. There could be no better icing on the cake of unity than living to the principle that everyone else is more important than you.

## Step Three of the Remedy for Unity

A third step is to realize the power of diversity. All 2.5 billion Christians in the world are special, proven largely by the scripture that states that each person is a unique part of the body of Christ (Ro 12:4-7). All parts of the body are needed for the body to be whole and fully functional! Each of us have our own set of values, and opinions that when combined within the considerations of advancing God's kingdom always will yield the best results. I once called a colleague of mine to apologize for the lengthy debate we had during a business meeting and his response serves us well in validating the importance of diversity. Sam said to me, "Carl, if we agreed on everything the company wouldn't need both of us, would they?" We can best take advantage of diversity by first realizing that we don't always have the right answers but, instead, the right inputs. The best answer comes through the consideration of everyone's opinions. We must be a good listener and a good student by seeking information from everyone involved. As it has been said, "We learn nothing by doing all of the talking."

## Step Four of the Remedy for Unity

The final step is to, as Francis Chan puts it, fight for unity. Why we must fight for unity is that unity rubs against the very nature of humanity; unity is not common and even harder to maintain once achieved. Much of the reason for this condition is that people prefer to associate with those who stand in agreement with them; those who have a mutual likeness toward one another. Within the world of business, studies indicate that 72 percent of senior management in our country is incompetent! The reason? Because incompetent managers were promoted because they were liked by their supervisors, which carried precedent over their talent. To overcome such hurdles, the fight for unity in Christ requires us to make sure that unity takes precedent over any other topic, outside of those subjects that we are to hold in common, or any situation that may arise when groups of people congregate. More specifically, the term of unity must be discussed before, during and after any meeting of people. Anything else becomes secondary in nature. Agreement and commitment to unity must reach consensus by everyone involved. It's our nature to avoid those who stand in disagreement with us, so the questions become: Are we fighting to maintain unity with the Holy Spirit? Are we fighting for unity within our families? Is our congregation fighting for unity within the church? Is our church fighting for unity with other churches? And are churches fighting for unity with their communities?

## Summary of Remedy

Many find the concept of unity difficult, some even to the point of being confrontational. A great summary point for attaining unity is to allow it to be a byproduct of our love for one another; the same love that Christ demonstrated as He washed His disciples feet. We should remember that this act of service led to His new commandment, which is to love one another as He has loved us. Love is the most powerful word known to mankind that when lived out by each of us, truth rises to the top in all circumstances. Where there is such love there is no disunity.

The best instruction on making love the way of our life comes to us from Paul in Romans 12:9-21, which is worth reciting here and now:

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on this head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.*

## The Outcome

Now that the unity of the followers of Christ has been achieved, there are a number of outcomes that can be expected, largely driven by the roles we are to fulfill and the work to be completed. The fulfillment of each would promote the church back into its role of prominence and significance within each community.

The **first role and step of work** is for each member of each church, especially the clergy, to live within each of the four earlier shared remedies for unity, especially the summary remedy. This work requires an example to be set by the clergy and their provided education to their congregation. Many would jump at the opportunity to state that this is already being done, yet the condition of current unity and the brokenness of people within our communities indicates just the opposite. The problem isn't that the subject of unity and love is not being taught; the problem is that unity and love are conditional. Yes, we love one another as long as they believe what we believe and walk as we walk. Based upon Romans 12: 9-21 there is no condition that allows for conditional love, remembering that unconditional love does not advocate agreement with one another on every subject but the inclusion of everyone; the lost and the found! The professor of Old Testament Studies at Whitworth University once stated during one of his lectures that God is interested even in the Taliban members being saved. Need any more be said? Starting within each church and living to these principles of unity not only sets that stage for multiple denominations to work better together but provides the world a strong common position that the love of Christ is shared equally and available to all by the 350,000 church locations in our country (reported by the Hartford Seminary Institute).

The **second role and step of work** is to assemble for the purpose of representing a power of effect. With a reported 1,200 nonprofit entities in Spokane County, each one working individually can only make little squeaks in the ears of community leaders regardless of the goodness of their message. Having 1,200 come together under the regulation of Christ and through the governess of unity, a very common and loud voice is to be heard by all people and parties within the community.

As we've all realized the devastating effects of COVID 19, war, crime, addictions, and more, we see community leaders searching out new and better solutions to right the wrongs and the advent of such an association of members can most affectively bring more effective solutions to the table, all enabled by the power and blessing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The **final role and step of work** is to spread the message of unity throughout the land! The more who come the quicker the time table of change will be; change to heal the brokenness of people and bring the relevance of Jesus to the world who yet does not know Him. And as Francis Chan states and I can clearly sense, God patiently waits for our unity and once realized, He will release new and powerful blessings that the world has never seen that will sustain us and glorify Him as never done before!

## The Close



In closing I would like to provide you the words given to me by the Holy Spirit following much time in prayer over this subject, as I pleaded to hear the words that we must live by and here is what I was told to write and share: *“Most all those whom you’ve condemned shall be with Me in paradise. While they have taken a different path to Me than the one you’ve believed everyone should take, their hearts are just right! So, replace your unauthorized judgements of others with the same love that I continue to share with you each and every day, for in such love there is no error, only good.”* Amen!