

Reflections from Revelation_Walking In Love & Unity_Episode 7 (Wayne Grudem)

Wayne Grudem says “There is strong emphasis in the New Testament on the unity of the church. Jesus’ goal is that “there shall be one flock, one Shepherd” (**John 10:16**), and he prays for all future believers “that they may all be one” (**John 17:21**).”

“Anyone who cares about the church or is involved with the church needs to study these letters because every problem, difficulty, and challenge facing the church is addressed in the seven letters.” Jon Courson

Letters to the 7 churches from Revelation 2-3

- The number 7 has the idea of completion or perfection
- Gives a complete picture of the challenges and difficulties that the church encounters
- Gives us a picture of Christ and His glorious Church
- The beauty of Jesus seen in all aspects of the Church
- Multiple local congregations and denominations are all part of a big beautiful body with many personalities, gifts, and thoughts **1 Cor 12:4-7**

“In discussing the unity of the church, there are no direct New Testament commands to separate from Christians with having doctrinal differences (unless those differences involve such serious heresy that the Christian faith itself is denied).” (Wayne Grudem)

Unity in the Church

- We can think differently about a doctrine and still have fellowship
- Fractions in the body resulting over issues of disagreement
 - Examples-Church government or woman pastors or speaking in tongues

PRIMARY ISSUES VS SECONDARY ISSUES (closed hand issues vs open hand issues)

- A closed hand issue would be core (die on a hill) doctrines of the faith:
 - EXAMPLE: Jesus is God, Born of a Virgin, Died for our sin, and is coming back
 - The Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God OR Salvation by grace thru faith
 - Another example would be our statement of faith
- Open handed issue would be things that people have different interpretations over
 - Examples: Sovereignty of God vs Free Will, Eschatology- pre trib or mid post trib. Philosophy of ministry, Song style, Church size, Teaching Style...
 - These differences should never cause us to walk in division, hate, gossip or slander.
- It is important to know the differences of an open hand issue and closed hand issue

Revelation study will present many secondary (open hand) issues

- Appropriate that our Church’s teaching will have opinions and interpretations
 - People in our church and other denominations may have some different views
 - Listen and love in our differences
 - Differing views on Eschatology (end times study) shouldn’t cause division in our fellowship
- “Wrong reasons to leave a church body would include such things as personal ambition and pride, or differences on minor doctrines are practices.” (WG)
- Differing views and interpretations will be presented in our study

Strive for Unity and Love in the Body

- **Phil 2:2** Paul’s encouragement to “complete my joy by being at the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind”
- **Eph 4:3** Christians are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”
- **Eph 4:12-13** Different gifts given to the church “for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of stature of the fullness of Christ
- God gave us different gifts, viewpoints, and cultures not to cause us to split but to be unified

“The body of Christ consist of many members and those members are all “one body”” (1 Cor 10:17; 12:12) (WG)

- As the picture of the churches in Revelation would be incomplete without looking at all 7, the body of Christ today would not be the same without ‘those other churches’
- In our differences we can still walk in unity

1 Cor 1:10 “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no dissensions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment”

Responding to our differences:

- Differences shouldn’t cause division and friction but rather further push us into love
- Be gracious in what we speak and quick to listen to others **James 1:19**
- See the beauty in being united amidst our differences
- In areas where our beliefs are challenged, be strengthened, and sharpened by seeking God and the scripture **Prov 27:17**
- In a world filled with division let honor, love, and respect be our response **Rom 12:10**
- We are to be loving to those that oppose us and are not Christians **1 Peter 3:15**
- Remember Jesus prayed for us so we would walk in unity (unity BUT not uniformity).

“This unity will be a witness to unbelievers, for Jesus prays “that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” **John 17:23** (WG)

- It is powerful to disagree and still love
- Recognize that God is our final authority and trust that He will judge everyone righteously
- We don’t always need to be right nor know everything...Jesus will take care of it all

Eph 4:4-6 **4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

“We must realize that such unity does not actually require one worldwide church government over all Christians. In fact, the unity of believers is often demonstrated quite effectively through voluntary cooperation and affiliation among Christian groups.” (WG)

Multiple churches in one region is good and beneficial for God’s mission:

- Multiple churches provide variety of gifts and services
 - Some value teaching and seminary, others evangelism and outreach, other churches work on social justice, other churches are more charismatic, and worship driven
 - Serving the community: Avenue Church food distribution program, Trinity Lutheran hosting other churches in sharing their facilities, Redemption Church offering encouraging words and influence to leadership
 - God placed each member in their church for a certain reason using different people, callings, leadership, and ministries
- Multiple churches in one city is not competition but a means of God’s grace to the city
 - Different values and different leadership and will reach different types of people. “Moreover, different types of ministries and different emphasis in ministry may result in different organizations, all under the universal headship of Christ as Lord of the church. Therefore the existence of different denominations, mission boards, Christian educational institutions, college ministry, and so forth is not necessarily a mark of disunity of the church (though in some cases it may be), for there may be a great deal of cooperation and frequent demonstrations of unity among such diverse bodies as these.”(WG)
- Our diversity allows for more ministry to happen
 - **Acts 15:39-40** God used disagreement to grow the mission
 - The seven churches of Revelation were in the same region BUT different cities with different conditions, yet God was in the midst of all of them

When would you leave a local church and for what reasons:

Wayne Grudem gives 3 reasons for separation from a church and believers: Doctrinal reasons, reasons of conscience, and practical conditions.

1. Doctrinal Reasons

- Doctrinal positions of a church deviates from biblical standards in a serious way
- False teaching (primary issue) which contradicts Biblical truth found in scripture
- Statement of Faith disagreement on the primary issues

2. Matters of Conscience

“In the area conscience, if a Christian had no freedom to preach or teach as his or her conscience, informed by Scripture would dictate, it might be thought that separation was necessary or at least wise. But caution and great humility are in order here; individual judgment may be distorted especially if it is not informed by the consensus of faithful believers throughout history, and by the counsel of believers in the present.” (WG)

- Counsel necessary with any ‘enlightenment’ received
- Evaluate philosophies of ministry that you are not comfortable with
- Discern if matters of conscience affect our submission to leadership
- Understand that our conscience is not biblical teaching and the Holy Spirit guides and matures us at different levels
- Whatever the conviction, it is important to pray and walk in unity

“Some people might also find it necessary or at least wise to leave a church on the basis of conscience if staying implied approval of some unbiblical doctrine or practice within the church, and thereby encourage others to follow the wrong doctrine or practice.” Wayne Grudem

- Our benefit to have a church home that you can support, agree with, and thrive under its leadership **Heb 13:17**

3. Practical considerations

“Christians may decide to separate from a parent church if after prayerful consideration, it seems that staying in the parent church will very likely result in more harm than good.” (WG)

- Location no longer practical
- God may call you to start a different church or ministry

Walk in unity, love and grace as you move forward when in disagreement:

- Devil wants us to be walking in dissension and discord
- Be aware of his schemes to bring division into the body of Christ (disunity)
- God tells us that He commands a blessing when we walk in unity **Psalm 133**
- Church it's too important to get sidetracked from the great commission God has given us in making disciples

“We can understand the purpose of the church in terms of ministry to God, ministry to believers, in ministry to the world.” -Wayne Grudem

What an incredible purpose we have to do together!

Colossians 3:14 “And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”