

ONE NATION, ONE CHURCH UNDER GOD

ser4060 One Nation Under God, Pt 4

July 25, 2021 E & L

by Pastor John Kulikowski

Good morning Church!

It's hard to believe that we are midway through the summer and before we know it the weather will be a little cooler and we'll be in the midst of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. I love celebrating the holidays and one of the favorite things for our family is to get our annual picture at Thanksgiving or Christmas and to share it with the world on social media.

Here's one of them:



This picture communicates by our smiles, and by how close we are to one another, just how much we love one another, which we do. Yet what it doesn't communicate is all the fussing and frustrations that occurred to capture such a moment. Although it portrays our love, it doesn't show our differences in how we think spiritually,

politically, socially, financially, and relationally. Interestingly enough, we have had many people over for meals who have experienced some of our heated and emotionally charged discussions around these topics. Many times after experiencing such a meal with us, people have shared how much they love spending time with us because of how we have loved one another in the midst of these discussions.

What does our picture of the Church, not only our church, meaning GCCC, but the entire Christian Church look like to the world?

The only way that they can get a picture of this is by how we, meaning all of us who attend GCCC, interact with each other, and how we interact with people who attend other churches.

In a recent Barna study, based on what Millennials see on social media and on the disagreements Christians have with one another, these interactions have become a repellant and not a magnet to bringing the younger people into the church to be part of the community.

Ouch, Ouch, Ouch, Ouch, Ouch!

The title of today's message is One Nation, One Church, Under God. If we as a church want to have an impact on our nation and bring unity, it needs to start with you and me together as the Church.

Let's pray.

Let's jump into scripture and take a look at how Jesus spent His final hour praying for us.

John 17:11 & 20-23

¹¹ “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to You. Holy Father, protect them by the power of Your Name, the Name You gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.”

²⁰ “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me. ²² I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one— ²³ I in them and You in Me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.”

Jesus prayed that we would be united. He prayed that all people would know how much God loves them and what Jesus did on the cross for them by our unity.

How are we doing on this unity deal as the entire Christian Church throughout the world? Would you grade the Church as a whole, on unity, with an A for excellence or an F for failure?

How would you grade yourself in trying to improve this assessment?

It is estimated that there are over 45,000 Christian denominations.

Francis Chan, in his most recent book called *Until Unity* says, “We are the most divide faith group that ever existed, and there isn’t even a close second.”

Why are we divided?

It's all about focus. Let me show you with the end in mind found in scripture.

Let's look at *Revelation 7: 9-12*

⁹ After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰ And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ¹¹ All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

How many were gathered in worship? "A great multitude that no one could count."

Where were they from? "Every nation, tribe, people and language."

Were they unified? Yes

Why were they unified? They were focused on Jesus the Lamb and God and were worshipping.

What we focus on either unifies or divides.

Francis Chan, in referencing Revelation 7: 9-12 states, “This is a picture of how we will be crying out to God for all eternity, united in total adoration of Him. Pause for a moment and imagine what it would be like to be there. If we want to see His kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven, we must worship Him at the forefront.”

Some of you may be saying, “That’s great, and in heaven everything is going to be perfect and we will be perfected. That just can’t happen here on earth because we are sinful and there are differences.”

That is a lie. Unity happens all the time in the midst of differences. It happens all the time in sports stadiums and arena with fans all cheering for the same team. They all think and live and look different and become united when their focus is on one thing; the team they are cheering for.

It’s all about our focus or our mission. A common mission brings oneness and unity.

What we focus on either unifies or divides.

What is our Mission?

Love God, love others and share the gospel. Share the truth of what Jesus has done for us on the cross to help others form and grow in their relationship with God. This is the great commission!

As Pastor Bruce stated last week, the enemy is constantly waging war to divide us, and this includes keeping us focused on the wrong things.

What we focus on either unifies or divides.

The early church was divided and it judged how others were carrying out the great commission.

Do any of us struggle with how other churches carry out the great commission? Are there any churches or speakers that we have seen on TV or online with whom we don't agree on their approach?

Listen to Paul's response to the early church, and to us, in his letter in ***Philippians 1:15-18***

"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."

If Christ is preached, lives are changed, and people are growing in their relationship with Him, then nothing else matters.

Let me give some examples from my own life.

Share story of how I came to Christ and left the Catholic Church and my mom went to a priest and shared her concern about me leaving and attending another church that wasn't Catholic. The priest asked if I was reading the Bible and growing in my

relationship with Christ. My mom's response was "yes." The priest responded, "Then you shouldn't be concerned, but thankful."

Share story of when Lizzie was in high school and struggled with anxiety and how a TV preacher, who I didn't agree with completely, was used by God to help her trust God more with her anxiety.

Share how my children are all attending services in different denominations, currently, yet all are at different places in their relationships with Christ and are growing in their faith.

What we focus on either unifies or divides.

Unity isn't a choice, it's a command.

Paul, in **1 Corinthians 1:10**, New Living Translation tells us:

"I appeal to you, dear brothers and sisters, by the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, to live in harmony with each other. Let there be no divisions in the church. Rather, be of one mind, united in thought and purpose."

Francis Chan continues, "There is a common deception in our culture. We believe that unity comes through softening on truth, sticking to positions that aren't very controversial, trying to not offend, and steering clear of conflict. Yet this couldn't be further from the truth. True unity comes not because we are careful enough to avoid conflict, but because Jesus has made us new, given us the ability to forgive quickly, filled us with grace, and put His love inside us. So, when we do offend or hurt each other, unity in the body isn't broken because we forgive."

Let me emphasize here, our focus is not to be pointing out or drawing attention to the sins of those who don't have a relationship with Christ. The only people who Jesus spoke against were those who did this, the religious rulers.

Loving others and telling others the truth about Jesus' love for them has to be our focus, a focus that unifies us, regardless of the how.

Love needs to be our highest goal. If it is not, you and I are just clanging symbols, making noise in the streets as Paul tells us in the famous love chapter in **1 Corinthians 13**.

Colossians 3:14 emphasizes this truth:

“And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

If we are to be one church, and love as one church, we need to be humble and admit our need for one another. I recently read this truth:

“All of us have an incomplete, flawed knowledge of God. Without humility, we will never have unity.”

Regardless of your age, how many times you have read the Bible, or how long you have had a relationship with God, we all have an incomplete knowledge of Him and won't have a full picture until we are home in heaven with Him. This emphasizes the importance of being a part of a small group, which we here at GCCC, call our Circle of Friends. It's in these groups that you get to hear and learn about God through scripture and from one another through their

relationships with Him. For those of you who are currently not a part of a Circle of Friends, you will have the opportunity to join one this fall.

Here is an interesting fact; United and Untied are both spelled with the same exact letters.

Which letter from the word United, when moved, changes the word and means something completely different? Yes, it's the letter "I." Our focus, my focus, your focus. What you or I feel is important is what will encourage us to push our church, and the church at large, to be "United" and attractive or "Untied", divided and all of the place.

Where is God calling you and me to change our focus to bring unity within His church and change the world?

There may be some of you here today who have never entered into that relationship with Christ and allowed Him to change your world and focus for the better. It's as easy as ABC.

Admit that you are a sinner and that you have chosen to live your life your way,

Believe that Jesus died on the cross for your sins so that you can be in a relationship with the God who loves you.

Commit your life to Him today and to the pursuit of becoming who God created you to be in sharing His love with others.

Do it today.

Pray . . .

I close with this encouragement from ***Romans 15: 5-6*** NLT

“May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. ⁶ Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What we focus on either unifies or divides.

Let's worship Him in how we live our lives together in living out the Gospel.