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UNTIL UNITY
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This book is dedicated to the followers
of Jesus from various denominations
who have forgiven me for my arrogance
and divisiveness over the years.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Ephesians 4:11–16

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Introduction

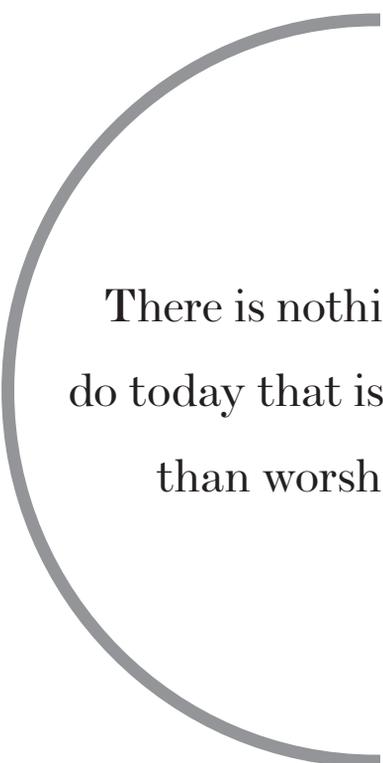
Be honest: How much time did you spend praising Jesus this morning?

Asking for things doesn't count. Just reading a passage of Scripture doesn't count. I'm asking, How much time did you spend staring at Him and telling Him how amazing He is?

We were God's enemy, destined to face His wrath. Let that sink in.

Jesus was tortured on the cross to appease the wrath of God. Does that truth still move you?

You are now reconciled with God and adopted as His child. How do we go a day without praising Him for this?



There is nothing you have to
do today that is more important
than worshipping Him.

God now abides in you! Don't just give this a head nod. Marvel at this!

Put this book down and worship Him. You are breathing now because God is giving you breath. Use your next breath for its intended purpose. Bless Him.

*Bless the LORD, O my soul,
and all that is within me,
bless his holy name!*

—Psalm 103:1

We can't start our days without praise. We are commanded to rejoice in Him always. There is nothing you have to do today that is more important than worshipping Him. If I'm not wise enough to start my day with praise, why should anyone listen to what I have to say? If I am foolish enough to forego praise because my mind is needed to fix problems in the church, then I'm more of the problem than I realize.

Our lack of praise may actually be the biggest cause of our divisions. Once we stop worshipping, all hope for unity is lost. This is what unites us: we can't stop talking about the treasure we have in Jesus. It's hard to start an argument with someone who is on her knees shouting praises to Jesus, especially when you're busy blessing the Lord as well. Many of our problems could be reconciled if we discussed our concerns on our knees

before a Holy God. We can't allow the Enemy or our enemies to interrupt our praise. Worship is our path to unity.

Even now I would encourage you to look up the following passages that explain the truths mentioned above: Romans 5:10–11; Ephesians 2:3–4; Romans 3:23–25; 1 John 3:1; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 14:21–23. Fill your heart with worship, and keep it filled. You and I are part of an outrageous love story. Once we lose our fascination, we lose our effectiveness. Our words end up doing more harm than good. With a heart of thanksgiving, let's address the issues.

Our Broken Family

We are currently the most divided faith group on earth, and there isn't a close second. If you think I'm exaggerating, name another religion with more than two or three factions. We have thousands of denominations and ministries, each believing their theology or methodology is superior. The saddest part of this is that our Savior was crucified to end our divisions, commands us to be united, and says we will impact the world when we become one.

We can't just go back to our various circles and continue our discussions about how deceived our brothers and sisters are. It's time to try something different. What if we each made it our goal to strive for a level of humility we've never had? We could spend our circle time on our knees crying

out to the God of truth, begging Him to expose any pride or deception that has crept into our own lives.

We need to stop thinking that our primary duty toward our fellow believers is to critique them. It's not. Our primary duty is to love them. Paul says we owe a debt of love to each other (Rom. 13:8). Yet it seems we invest far more time in learning than loving. Honestly evaluate the amount of time you spend acquiring information compared to the amount of time you spend asking God to increase your love for His children.

We have been treating our divisions like our national debt. It worsens every minute, but it doesn't affect our daily lives so we don't feel an urgency to change it. That's at the root of the problem: we can't stop thinking about ourselves. We have forgotten how our divisions affect God and an unbelieving world. Our casual, dismissive attitude toward unity is incredibly dangerous for three reasons:

1. God is disgusted with it.
2. The world is confused by it.
3. It could be evidence that the Holy Spirit is not in us.

Tremble

I don't want this book to be my efforts at talking you out of division. That won't last. The wisdom to refrain from

unloving speech has to start with a fear of God and His commands. In Isaiah 66, God says:

*Thus says the LORD:
“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things came to be,
declares the LORD.
But this is the one to whom I will look:
he who is humble and contrite in spirit
and trembles at my word.”* (vv. 1–2)

Whom does God look to? The humble person who *trembles at His word!*

You're about to read through some Scriptures regarding unity. Before you do so, take a moment to remember that these Scriptures are sacred commands from a terrifying God. Some of you may have been taught to tremble at commands regarding sexual immorality but not the ones demanding unity. Unity has been looked at as a cute topic for those who don't have the theological expertise to look into deeper issues. Unity has been viewed as a soft option for those who don't care about truth. I urge you to let go of any of that mentality

and simply tremble at each verse before a Holy God. Only when we take Scripture seriously will we understand that God cares more about unity than any human being ever has.

I am convinced that if you tremble at these Scriptures, you won't even have to read the rest of the book. I pray that God would choose to pour His grace out as you read His commands. I would love to hear from readers, "I never got past the introduction. It was all I needed."

*There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers.*

—Proverbs 6:16–19

*I do not ask for these only, but also for those
who will believe in me through their word,
that they may all be one, just as you, Father,
are in me, and I in you, that they also may be
in us, so that the world may believe that you
have sent me. The glory that you have given
me I have given to them, that they may be one*

even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

—John 17:20–23

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you 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. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

—Ephesians 4:1–6

But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

—Titus 3:9–11

For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

—Galatians 3:27–28

Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

—Romans 14:4

I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

—1 Corinthians 1:10

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

—Philippians 2:1–2

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

—Colossians 2:16–19

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

—1 Thessalonians 3:11–13

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from

these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

—1 Timothy 1:5–7

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

—1 Timothy 6:3–5

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

—2 Timothy 2:23–25

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

—James 3:17–18

Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

—1 John 2:9–11

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

—1 John 4:10–12

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

—Matthew 5:9

Please don't be afraid to take these commands literally. It has become the case that if I take a biblical statement about sexual behavior literally, I'm called a conservative and my stance is considered "biblical." But, sadly, if I take one of these biblical statements about avoiding disunity or pursuing oneness literally, I'm called a liberal and my stance is considered soft and cowardly and compromising.

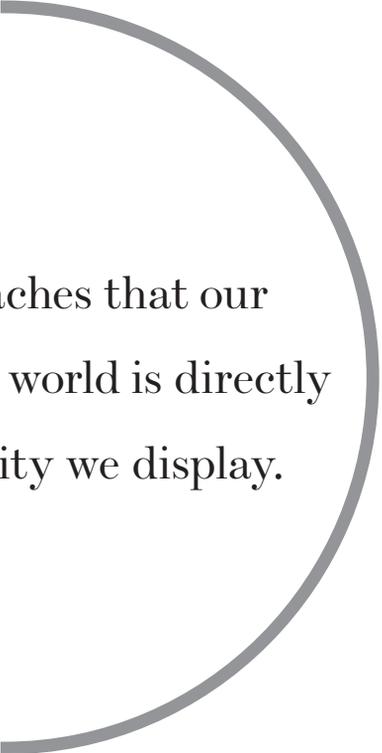
That's wrong. We all have to make choices about which parts of the Bible are meant to be taken literally. All of us. I can't tell you every passage that is meant to be taken purely literally. (Selling all your possessions? Plucking out your eye? Wearing head coverings?) But I can tell you that I'm extremely confident that Jesus' commands to love and be unified and to avoid controversy are meant to be taken literally.

Witness

Have you ever considered how outsiders must view us? Try to imagine an unbeliever going online and trying to make sense of all the different denominations, church splits, competitive advertising, and open slander. It would look

like my family screaming frantically at each other while walking through an orphanage to meet kids wanting adoption. There is a reason people aren't anxious to join our family. What picture of God are we showing to the world? If the church is supposed to be a reflection of the image of God and the aroma of Christ to those who are perishing, it is no wonder that people are not attracted. Don't try to comfort yourself with verses like John 15:18: "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you." The world currently hates us not because we resemble Jesus but because we don't. We are arrogant and there is a serious disconnect between our beliefs and actions.

Scripture teaches that our influence on the world is directly tied to the unity we display. Meanwhile, we continue to publicly degrade one another, oblivious to how we appear to the world. We continue to draw lines that make sense to *us* but not to those watching. Does this bother you? Don't forget that we are talking about real people headed for a real Hell. Don't just lump everyone into some vague group. We are talking about your friends, cousins, children, and neighbors. They are all glad that Christianity works for you, but they don't see any need to be "saved" by Jesus. They don't even believe in a Judgment Day. According to Scripture, that would change if the Church were united.



Scripture teaches that our
influence on the world is directly
tied to the unity we display.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction, but of your salvation, and that from God.

—Philippians 1:27–28

It's great that you share the gospel with those you love, but it's our unity that will cause them to actually believe your words. Most of us would say that we would do anything to see our loved ones know Jesus. Are you willing to make a serious effort toward unity? How much humbling, repentance, and suffering are you willing to endure to see the Church unified?

Salvation

If you find yourself apathetic toward the commands of God for unity and unconcerned with how this appears to the world, you might have a bigger problem. It's possible that the Holy Spirit is not in you, that you are not really saved. Does that sound like a shocking statement? It shouldn't. Scripture is clear about the marks of a true believer and the fruit that flows out of a life indwelt by the Holy Spirit:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

—Galatians 5:19–23

I want you to take a close look at the first list: the works of the flesh. It's easy to glance over it and check off enough boxes to assure ourselves we have nothing to worry about. I'm not living in sexual immorality or drunkenness, and I've never thought about becoming a sorcerer, so I'm good. But have you ever noticed that enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalry, dissension, division, and envy are also on that list? And have you ever really trembled at the warning that "those who do such things **will not inherit the kingdom of God**"? God takes these sins seriously, much more seriously than we do in the modern church, and if we do not change, we will reap the consequences.

Now look at that second list—the one you probably have memorized:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

—Galatians 5:22–23

I think this is a good time to remind you that just because you believe a truth doesn't guarantee you possess it. "A. W. Tozer describes the textualist as a person who assumes that because he affirms the Bible's veracity, he automatically possesses the things of which the Bible speaks."¹ Too many people live as though affirming a biblical truth is equivalent to having it in reality. Seminary can teach you how to memorize a menu, but that doesn't ensure you'll ever taste the food. It's terrifying to think that Hell may have no shortage of Bible teachers with good theology.

Back to Galatians: Paul is explaining the fruit that results from a person rooted in the Spirit. Don't treat this as I used to—a checklist to find my weaknesses so I can work on those areas. The point is that a good tree will produce good fruit. This is what the Spirit *will* produce when He becomes the new master of a person. Don't get caught up in working harder to change the fruit of your life. Get to the root. Why do words come out of your mouth that sound unkind, ungentle, unloving? Jesus says the problem is not your mouth but your heart (Matt. 12:34). If love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are not flowing out of our hearts, it's not because we aren't trying hard enough. It's because we're not connected to the Spirit of God. It's that serious.

End the Hopelessness

The situation that the Christian Church finds itself in appears hopeless. We have tried holding events to promote unity, creating common doctrinal statements to build unity, and even praying for unity. Nothing has worked because we are not getting to the root issue. We think the problem is differences in theology or practice, so we spend a lot of time arguing about different passages in Scripture. We believe unity will only happen once we convert the other side to our opinion.

In reality, our divisions are caused by much deeper issues: our conflicting desires (James 4), our propensity for jealousy and selfish ambition, which leads to “disorder and every vile practice” (James 3), and ultimately the immaturity of our faith. Too many people call themselves Christian who have never experienced a deep connection with God. Because so few people have experienced His love, even fewer are able to share it. If our relationship with God is robotic or non-existent, our bond of love with others will be equally weak. When love is shallow, all it takes is something as trivial as a disagreement to divide us.

I know I will be mocked for my simplicity, but love really is the answer. Somehow, as we have advanced in our sophisticated theological discussions, we have stopped growing in our love for God and each other. Yet Jesus said that love for God and love for our neighbor are literally the most important things (Mark 12:28–31). There is a hope for unity, but until you are willing to accept the simplicity of it, we will continue to divide.

A miracle was supposed to happen when the Holy Spirit entered our bodies: we were supposed to yield the fruit of supernatural love for each other. It didn't happen. In fact, the opposite did. If there truly is one unity-loving Spirit leading us, it makes no sense that we are becoming more and more divided. So either the Spirit never entered some of us, or we have done a masterful job of suppressing Him. No matter how many Bible verses you know and how well you can teach the Scriptures, you have to be willing to examine the fruit of your life to see if the Spirit has truly entered you.

After honest examination, you may discover that you are not as humble and loving as you thought. If you don't really love people that deeply, it could be because you haven't experienced the love of Christ deeply. There may be an arrogance or emptiness in your soul that has caused more division than you realize. It might not be everyone else's fault after all. Will you humble yourself to admit the possibility of pride in your life that requires repentance? This could turn out to be

the greatest discovery of your life. Humility and repentance always lead to life and grace. It could be that repenting of our pride will lead to a vibrant love relationship with God and others, resulting in a fullness of life that we've never tasted.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.

—Colossians 3:12–15

Throughout the Scriptures, we see God place people in seemingly impossible situations. He then moves miraculously to display His power (e.g., parting the Red Sea, raising Lazarus from the dead, etc.). As our divisions increase and deepen, we find ourselves again in a situation that requires a miracle. Now seems to be the perfect time for God to answer the prayer that Christ prayed for oneness (John 17). While some people in the church add to the division, I believe there is a much greater army of believers who are done with all the

needless fights and factions. There are swarms of saints on their knees praying like Christ that we would become one. There are men and women with childlike faith who are willing to pay the price to fight for unity. Most importantly, we have a God who performed the most loving act in history because He wanted us to be one with Him. Why wouldn't we believe that He would move now to make His children one with each other?