



Unity – A Fight Worth Having

[Ephesians 4:1-6](#) (NIV)

Last in a 6-month [Member Statement of Faith](#) rollout process

Pastor Matt Friend – March 25 & 28, 2021

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– **OUTLINE** –

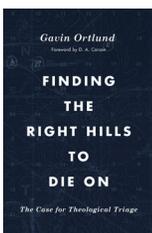
Today's Big Idea:

The fight for unity is a fight worth having.

Questions for Contemplation:

- #1 – Would my family and friends agree that the gospel is the highest priority of my life?
- #2 – Can I admit that I might be wrong about some of my convictions, preferences, and opinions?
- #3 – Do I love others more than I love being right?
- #4 – Do I major on the majors and minor on the minors?

Resource Recommendation:



*[Finding the Right Hills to Die On:
The Case for Theological Triage](#)*

By Gavin Ortlund



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– NOTES –

Introduction:

Approximately 2,000 years ago, shortly after Jesus ascended back into heaven, sent the Spirit, and birthed the Church... the big question on the Christian mind was, “How can the Church hold together when Christians are so different from one another?”

God’s solution was *not* for them to be in different churches. There was a better way back then, and there is still a better way today.

Today’s Big Idea:

The fight for unity is a fight worth having.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

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. My prayer is... 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. (John 17:11, 20-23)

So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:26-29)

“Even though we have the life of the Trinity in us, we live in spiritual immaturity until we do the hard work of maintaining unity in the church.”
–Tim Keller



Questions for Contemplation:

#1 – Would my family and friends agree that the gospel is the highest priority of my life? ([Ephesians 4:1](#); cf. [Romans 5:9-10](#); [6:11](#); [1 Corinthians 15:1-58](#); [Galatians 2:20](#))

What's the calling we have received? According to [Ephesians chapters 1-3](#), it's the gospel.

What's the gospel? The good news that the living God—who demands perfection of all humankind—sent His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world: to live a sinless life; to suffer and die on the cross as the substitute for our sins (absorbing the judgment we rightfully deserve); to rise again; to ascend back into heaven; and to grant forgiveness, righteousness, His Spirit, and eternal life at the moment anyone repents and believes.

Christian: the gospel is for you too. The gospel isn't the finish line of the Christian life, but the starting line, the finish line, and everything in between. It's the track you run on, the air you breathe, the water you drink, the team you run with, the gear you wear.

The gospel not only declares, "Jesus saves!" It also declares, "Jesus transforms!"

If you believe Jesus can save you from hell, you can also believe He can save you from your habits, your hang-ups, and your hopelessness.

Would your family and friends agree that the gospel is the highest priority of your life: more than sports, money, success, popularity, pleasure, power, America, security, guns, cars, technology?

#2 – Can I admit that I might be wrong about some of my convictions, preferences, and opinions? ([Ephesians 4:2a](#); cf. [Proverbs 3:5-7](#); [Isaiah 66:2](#))

Being completely humble and gentle begins with realizing that we are not God and that there might be some things we don't know that we don't know.

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:5-7)

Unfortunately, various groups of Christians have used the Bible (out of context) to defend some very erroneous things in the past: segregation;



slavery; denying women the right to vote; denying mothers pain relief medication for childbirth (or pain relief in general); refusing contraception; or even some who used the Bible to justify their support for Adolph Hitler.

Is it possible that we too could be wrong about some of our beliefs on the timing of rapture or millennium; the age of the earth; the length of days in [Genesis 1](#); the systems we use to interpret the Bible (dispensationalism, reformed theology); women's role in the church; sign gifts used in missions today?

On the personal level, it's also possible that there are some things that are right or wrong for you but they may not be right or wrong for someone else, such as: how you choose to educate your children; whether or not you get the vaccine; beverages you drink or don't drink; movies you watch or don't watch?

#3 – Do I love others more than I love being right? ([Ephesians 4:2b](#); cf. [John 13:34-35](#); [Romans 14-16](#); [1 Corinthians 13:1-8](#))

Being “patient” literally means to be *long-fused*. Instead of having a short-fuse, you give others space to grow. You allow some time to pass before you press *send* on that angry email, before you say what you think. You are slow to hit the *eject* button on your relationships.

“Bearing with one another in love” literally means *to hold yourself back from one another*. It's the resolve to put up with other people's differences, even when their personalities, attitudes, and decisions rub you the wrong way.

We could ask ourselves this question in various ways:

- When I argue, what means more to me: winning the relationship or winning the argument?
- Am I more interested in winning the friend or winning the fight?
- When I debate, do I see a person in front of me or a position in front of me?
- Am I more concerned with unity or uniformity? (They aren't the same thing.)



If you're at odds with someone in this church, in this community, in your family, or at your job—as a Christian—you only have two choices:

- Address the problem (by asking them about it or sharing your feelings) or
- Overlook it. (“Love covers a multitude of sins.”)

#4 – Do I major on the majors and minor on the minors? ([Ephesians 4:4-6](#); cf. [Romans 14-16](#); [Colossians 3:12-15](#))

It's been said, “There's no doctrine a fundamentalist won't fight over and no doctrine a liberal will fight over.” May the Lord help us to avoid both extremes.

The Apostle Paul would never advocate for the phrase, “Doctrine divides but love unites.” Actually, it's core Christian doctrine that unites us. However, Paul did encourage us to major on the majors and minor on the minors.

It might initially sound spiritual to say that “all doctrines are equally important,” but it's a difficult statement to justify biblically. The Bible teaches that some doctrines are more important (and should be emphasized more) than others, especially those required for saving faith, those closely connected to the gospel, and those we are forbidden to deny under the threat of condemnation.

- In Matthew 23:23-26 Jesus said, “You have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness.”
- In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul said, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”
- See also: [John 17:3](#); [Romans 4:4-5](#); [1 Corinthians 16:22](#); [1 John 1:5-10](#); [4:1-3](#).

Perusing the unity of the church does not mean that we stop caring about (or even debating) the minors. It just means that we show grace when we discuss them and stop requiring everyone to agree with us on every preference and opinion.

According to [Romans 14-16](#), this is actually the sign of maturity. Mature



Christians show grace in the minors. Immature Christians don't.

Have you ever met a person who thought they were right on every issue, and often made a “federal” case out of a “county” issue? The sad part about these kinds of people is that they don't just do it to the church, but they also do it to their spouse, children, close friends, and coworkers.

Paul has much to say about this kind of dangerous person: [1 Timothy 1:3-7; 4:6-10; 6:2-5, 20-21; 2 Timothy 2:14-16, 23; 4:3-4; Titus 1:13-14; 3:9.](#)

The problem with making every error a heresy is that it renders union more difficult. It also hurts our witness. Some Christians have spoken so loudly about preferences and opinions that, when they finally do speak of Jesus, there's no one left listening to them. The real slippery slope of the Christian life is saying “farewell” to every Christian who believes a little bit differently than you do.

Conclusion:

Why is it so important for us to ask ourselves these four questions and to answer them honestly? Because...

The fight for unity is a fight worth having.