

3/20/22 - John 17:20-26 - "Be United In Christ"

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[0 : 00] We live in a day and age today where the expression of Christian faith seems to be creating various divisions and factions.

All stemming from a variety of what is essential to be a Christian and what is non-essential to being a Christian. We have a titled sermon today called Be United in Christ.

And we're going to be talking about what this specifically means. Because as we survey church history all throughout the ages, since the time of Jesus' death and resurrection, it seems as if, yeah, the church has grown in age and size and numerical values.

But it's also grown in distinctions and denominations of divisions. You can see throughout the centuries, starting with Judaism, leading to Pauline theology that Paul had taught, leading to the great split of 1054 called the Great East-West Schism that happened between Eastern Orthodox and the Catholic Church.

And that was a big, huge, monumental break in beliefs. And it was a good thing to happen. And then also leading to, similar to that, the Protestant Reformation of 1517, leading to the break from the Catholic Church.

[1 : 38] And we see these significant expressions of what it means to be a Christian. And from there, from that point forward, from 1517, you have all these denominations and convictions.

And the newest ones, the newest prominent ones being Salvation Army and Assemblies of God. And so while we can look upon the landscape of all these distinctions and divisions and denominations, if we were to organize these groups in simply three separate groups, we would be able to analyze various convictions that each of these denominations hold and be able to probably fit them within different groups.

And the first one being what would be known as the evangelical group, the fundamental group or conservative group over here on the right. And those hold fast to salvation as a free gift from God, that it's through our faith in Jesus Christ that we're saved.

They believe that the Bible is inspired. It's inerrant. It's authoritative. That would be the first group.

The second group, kind of in the middle, would be mainline or sort of like progressive.

That would be a group that identifies faith in Jesus Christ as the way to salvation. But then there's more acceptance in other faiths and beliefs.

[2 : 56] And there's a big emphasis upon works, determining our eternal state of what lay waiting ahead and what we are achieving in life. And then all the way on the left, you see the liberal side, the liberal Christianity.

Those are very accepting of all faiths, wide roads, very inclusive, very universal. And so if you're confused today, church, as you look around on your way to church, if you would have got a dollar for every church that you pass, every church building you pass, you'd probably have at least \$10 in your pocket right now.

And we'd be going to Starbucks and getting, how much are lattes these days? Too expensive in my opinion. But if you were confused about this, driving to church today, looking at all these churches, knowing today there's multiple gatherings going on, I don't think you're alone in that.

Consider 75% of the United States population identifies as Christian, fitting within one of these three camps, right? And this 75% church consists of 20,000 denominations within the 75% of who identifies as Christian.

20,000 denominations, seven major alliances, and over 150 religious traditions. But we get to a passage today where Jesus focuses in on praying for the future church.

[4 : 29] And I believe, as we enter into the passage today, that we will be enabled to cut through the denominational noise that we see, to cut through our confusion, and be able to identify where

the line is drawn if we are to be united in Christ.

God has been on a mission of gathering the church. We saw this back in John 10, verse 16. Context tells us that God has had this vision and plan of unifying one flock with one shepherd. This is also referred to as gathering of the scattered people of God into one in John 11, 52. And so we know that context testifies that unity, if there's any unity that's to be had in this life, it is all because of the power of God unifying that one flock under the one chief shepherd, Jesus Christ. And so we can't forget that Jesus is praying for this very thing, for God to unify that one flock under the chief shepherd.

This is his prayer at this time. Jesus is hours away from death. He is literally just Judas is on the way back.

[5 : 57] We can see in chapter 18, it is all downhill from here. The cross is waiting for him. And the last two Sundays that we've been together here studying God's word, we've looked at Jesus's high priestly prayer, which has kind of been broken up into threes.

This is the third section of his high priestly prayer, where not only Jesus prayed for himself, he interceded also for the disciples. And then today, he's interceding on behalf of the future church. In other words, he's praying here at this time for Steel Valley Church. Think about that. And what I pray today that God does through his word is that we can be convinced that unity can be achieved without compromise.

You often talk about unifying the church, and that comes with a slew of like, oh boy. Okay, what kind of Christian are you? And you start to dissect one another and everything.

We can be unified because God has given us the means of being unified, and he gives it to us in this passage, and we'll see. And I pray that it convinces us of the same. And this will serve in our lives to be properly preserving and applying God's word as we look upon what it means to be unified, to be united in Christ.

[7 : 21] And we're going to see this in two sections today in the message. We're going to see this firsthand of a more physical and spiritual manifestation of the church.

This is a proclamation of what God has provided to us. The church has been set apart. They've been brought into relationship with God. In so doing, God has provided them a Messiah, and so they have been brought into the unifying, abiding relationship with God, the Father, and Jesus, the Son.

And then the second thing we're going to be looking at is the future promise, which I'm calling a shadow of God's promise, all relating to the unity of the church.

And so let's break this down into those two sections. And as we begin, it is a challenging message to think practically of Jesus's intercession, but better for us to sit under his word and to be instructed and guided by it so that we can be challenged, encouraged, and built up by the word of God.

So let's do that right now. Let's look at this gathering process as it serves, first and foremost, as an expression of God's provision of gathering his people.

[8 : 38] Let me put the first section title up for you, note takers, as we go through this text. Again, we're two sections today, and the first section is to show us that we are an expression of God's provision.

Look with me in verse 20. God's word says, I do not ask for these only. Simply meaning that he's not petitioning for himself.

He's not just petitioning for the disciples. But also for those who will believe in me through their word. Whose word?

The apostles' word. That they may all be one. Verse 20 answers some pretty relevant questions that we probably ask on our way in as we're feeling our \$10 of change that we just collected on our way to church today, right?

How are we to achieve the unity that God intended for us as a church? And Jesus provides a foundational.

[9 : 50] Foundational and straightforward means of how God gathers the one flock under the one shepherd. How he gathered Steel Valley Church to assemble here at 801 Wick Avenue.

We are united, church, by the belief in the apostolic message. That is the one unifying characteristic of which has the power of unifying us is the foundation that we built our unity upon the apostolic message and the belief thereof.

And so verse 21 makes it clear that as a gathered people, we rally around the apostolic message alone for salvation alone.

And our unity becomes bonded together similarly to how the Trinity is bonded together by one single essence. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit being three distinctions, three persons, but one essence.

Look what Jesus says here. He says that they may all be one. Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us.

[11:04] This is confusing language here. You'll get tongue-tied. Trust me, I had to literally write this verse out in my notes in order to understand and draw pictures of what is going on here.

This is a Trinitarian expression. And the church is unified by the apostolic message that proclaims one essence. And that essence is essential truth to the Christian faith.

And it's distinct from person to person. And it'll apply differently from less is life than my wife's life. It was distinct in persons, but it's united in essence.

And this is something for us to remember. Just as the Trinity is one essence with three distinct persons. So you might ask, okay, wise guy. Why does any of this matter?

Why does this matter? What is the purpose that this serves? Is it to show that we at Steel Valley Church are superior of all the other Christians?

[12:10] That we have the truth, right? Why this expression? Why this expression? Well, number one is that when we rally around the apostolic message, it has two vital components that we have to understand.

That this is going to bring a physical manifestation with a spiritual, unseen spiritual manifestation within all of us. Let's look at Jesus' words here.

He says that a church united around the apostolic message is the means of proclaiming the way of salvation to an unbelieving world. Isn't that what he says here at the end of verse 21?

So that the world may believe that you have sent me. Let me just try to clear my throat real quick. I feel like I'm doing little spurts here.

All right, back on track. And so we see that this purpose, that this unifying aspect of the apostolic message, believing in it, allowing it to unify us physically as a church, will proclaim a physical truth to the unbelieving world that Jesus Christ is the Messiah that came to earth, dealt with our sin, paid the penalty on the cross, and we are set free by it.

[13:24] Amen? And so unity is not subjective on personal opinions. You got the golf players over here. You got the disc golf players over here. You got the blazer wearers over here, and you got the people with the khaki shorts over here.

Right? You don't base unity upon personal opinions or personal interests, especially not personal opinions on who God is and what he's done.

It's not built around folks who look, who think, who dress, who talk the same way. No, unity in the church flows from a commitment to God's word alone.

Any unity built outside of that means is a simple social club. It is just a membership into a certain like-minded community.

And so in that sense, the unity of the church is supernatural. It exceeds all natural logic of why there would be such a diverse group of people.

[14:28] Some people like heavy metal music. Some people like country music, which, you know, we'll pray for them. But we don't need to distinguish ourselves and divide over those things because we are united in Christ.

He is the uniting essence of the church. And so God sanctifies the church as his word separates us from the world and enters us into relationship with Jesus Christ and assembling us physically in relationship with one another.

This is how sanctification works. But verse 22 says another thing. Not only is this going to be a physical manifestation of people getting together, this is going to reveal a spiritual proclamation as well.

On the other hand, look in verse 22. It says the glory. He mentions glory here again. The glory that you have given me, I have given to them, you, that they may be one even as we are one.

I in them and you in me. The unity Jesus is praying for is one that reveals the glory which we have been given by Jesus Christ. The assembly of the church is a physical manifestation, but in that glory, revealing the glory of God, that's the spiritual proclamation of what God has done.

[15 : 57] And this proclaims that, yeah, we reside, we meet here predominantly at 801 Wick Avenue, but we are citizens of heaven. And we are temporary residents here on earth.

And this will bring about, in verse 23, a perfect oneness. Look at that. Look at the language he uses in that. It's not just the oneness that unifies the church rallying around the apostolic word.

Because if we were perfectly one through that, that would be legalism, wouldn't it? By rallying around a bunch of rules and regulations. But we are perfectly one by the means of being abiding and finding ourselves hidden and clothed in the righteousness of the perfect one.

SVC, Steel Valley Church, is unified in the fact that we are all sinners in need of God's grace.

We deserve God's punishments for the wrath that should have been placed on us.

And we receive God's grace through believing and centering our lives around the apostolic message that roots us in physical establishment and proclamation and also spiritual proclamation.

[17 : 14] That we reveal God's glory in one another. This new identity, the glory of the church, is that we have been given that glory from Jesus Christ.

We don't get it from legalism. We inherit it from Jesus Christ. We are clothed not in our righteousness, but the righteousness of Christ. We can't do anything to achieve that.

It is given to us. How do we know about that? Because of the apostolic message. And the apostolic message is true. So as we survey our assembly, as we look around this room at all the people gathered here today, we should be able to overcome the country music, overcome the heavy metal music, overcome our disgruntled opinions on country music, and overcome anything that might be offensive that might cause us to stumble and be divided in this life.

Because we know who we are. We can see the glory of God in each other. That is the spiritual proclamation that this holds for us.

But why does this matter then? Why this? Look with me at the end of verse 23. Isn't this marveling?

[18 : 50] Just as God has gathered the church by the power of the message from the apostolic body, the church is the physical and spiritual arms that is reaching the world, that God has sent the Messiah into the world, and that he loves the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.

This is the message that the world needs through the hope of Jesus Christ coming and God's love for them. I don't know how else to say it, but the church is not a social club.

We socialize, but we're not a social club. The church is an army that God is building and he's establishing. Have this in your mind as we continue this text and continue to the end of our time.

We also see the second section of the passage today, that we are a shadow of God's promise. And we're going to look in verse 24.

It says, Father, I desire that they also, kind of introducing a new thought, a compound thought.

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am.

[20 : 13] To see my glory that you have given me, because you love me before the foundation of the world.

Not only is Christian unity, church, an expression of our sanctifying bonds and identifying with the apostolic message, it is an expression of a shadow of God's promise of things that are laying ahead for the church.

So while people can identify, yeah, as a group of fine people, country music and metal listeners meeting at 801 Wick Avenue. Yeah, that's great and dandy. We see their physical presence and we see that they have this love among each other that's like no other.

And they can't be more different people. So not only that, through this unity, we are showing the world what lays waiting ahead for the church.

The future promise, it's a shadow that casts forward. Think about what glory awaits the church. If you're in Christ today, I look forward to the day to be united with you at this time that Jesus is referring to.

[21 : 31] A time where we will witness the goodness of God on full display, completely separated from sin. Where we will experience the splendor of Jesus Christ's presence.

There will be no death. There will be no sin. There will be no sorrow. There will be no tears. There will be no pain. And this will go on and on and on through eternity.

This is what this unity serves to do in this unbelieving world. So considering those promises to come for the church, we have to labor strenuously at times.

I mean, we're all pretty much messed up people. The Old Testament and many different situations in the New Testament, the letters to churches, say that we're a pretty crazy set of people. Sin has made us pretty crazy. And so we need to strenuously work at this at times in order to preserve images and expressions of the promise that waits ahead.

[22 : 47] So if we are forgiven people and we will be found forgiven in a later time in the glory of Jesus Christ in eternity, we ought to be forgiving here and now.

If our burden has been borne upon the cross and we will leave our burden behind with our bodies behind and be received into glory, we are also understanding that Jesus Christ is the one who paid for our burdens.

So we share each other's burdens, as Christ has called us. We strive for good works. We encourage one another. All through the New Testament, we see these instructions to the church just getting them back on track, don't we?

The strivings of the church reveal heaven on earth. This is the expression, the testimony of our unity to an unbelieving world as Jesus Christ is interceding for here.

And this will happen through church discipline. It will happen through correction. It will happen through repentance, through bearing with one another, instructing one another, forgiving, praying, encouraging, all of these things together, heaven on earth.

[23 : 58] That is a glimpse that we have and that Jesus is praying for the church here and now in the passage and for the future church, even today and tomorrow of Steel Valley.

Church. It's a countercultural idea as a world lives for today, that today is all the world, unbelieving world will have. The church proclaims a greater hope that we're going home someday, that we're just merely passing by, that we're not bound to geographical locations.

We are eternally given a promise, an inheritance that lays waiting ahead for the church. Our suffering here is but for a moment, but eternity will last on and on and on.

And that is our hope. That is what we focus our minds upon. And this is a place where John has stated in his gospel is a place that Jesus is going to prepare for his church, to come back for his church, to bring them into the Father's house where there's lots of room.

This is the promise that we have in our unity to reveal. But I got to ask, maybe you're joining us today as a visitor.

[25 : 07] Maybe you wandered in from the streets. You're more than welcome to everything in this church family, to the coffee, to the bathrooms, everything. But maybe you're not in Christ today and you're just not assured of it.

Maybe you're thinking about all these promises and something that has been said about eternity or being consumed by the promises of the apostolic message being the unifying factor of the church. Maybe you've been hurt by the church in the past severely, in which you're just like, yeah, we'll just throw the baby out with the bathwater. And you just struggle right now in your life in order to really grasp what it means to be a Christian in a unified body.

I pray that you can repent of your sin, of your unbelief, because just because of a bad experience in life doesn't neglect or doesn't minimize the truth that God's word means for our lives.

And he desires to unify his church here on earth. And it would be a sin to withhold ourselves from unifying with the church. And so if that's you, if you're coming to faith in Jesus Christ, something's clicking today, I pray you don't leave here without talking to a pastor, me, Rick, or Pastor Les, to help you take those steps of faith in what that will look like for your life and to give you some good resource and to just love on you and pray with you and your new journey with Jesus Christ.

[26 : 37] Come to faith by just simply believing in this message and be received into the promises of God within an instance. It's an amazing grace that we have received from God.

And so Jesus finishes his time of prayer with kind of a concluding thought in verse 25 and 26.

Look with me. He says, Oh, righteous father, as he closes his prayer, even though the world does not know you, I know you. And these know that you have sent me.

He's essentially saying he knows the truth. The disciples know the truth that he has been sent as the Messiah. And now in verse 26, I have made known to them your name and I will continue to make it known that the love with which you love me may be in them and I in them.

And at the end of this sentence, he says, Amen. And Judas is on his way. This is not a concept that we embrace at an arm's length.

[27 : 52] This is something that affects our conduct as Christians. This conduct carries the apostolic message of Jesus Christ for the world to see the promises of God here and now.

And it will continue. Look how this process continues through the apostolic body. Just as the top and the tail, the beginning and the end of this passage says, I do not ask in verse 20 that only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word.

And then at the end of this passage, I will continue to make it known. God is in a process of gathering one people under one shepherd.

And the church is part of that. This is not something that we're just like, Amen. Let's go to Bob Evans and be on our way. Thanks for the hospitality and the coffee. And we'll be on our way.

This should affect us deep within our soul of the profound reality that God would go to such great lengths to save wretched sinners like you and me.

[29 : 03] We aren't deserving of even the common grace that is given to us through simply the air that we breathe because of our rebellion. We are a shadow of John 3.16.

May God so love the world. And this is seen within our midst. So as we close our time today, if you're just waking up this morning, what's the main idea?

What do you want me to take away from this, Pastor Brent? The intercession of Jesus Christ for the future church is to preserve the apostolic message as the unifying, essential unifying factor of the church to bear witness to the gospel.

Main idea of the passage. It all is built upon the foundation of the apostles, which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone.

And so as we look at our lives today, as we look upon the, remember the change in our pockets that we got on the way to church, as we look upon the denominations, the 20,000 denominations that exist, I'm sure a new one popped up somewhere in the world today of people who got it right and everyone else has it wrong, right?

[30 : 22] That's just the thing with denominations. And so what do the 20,000 denominations say about Jesus Christ prayer?

What about those three different groups, the evangelical, fundamental, or conservative group, the mainline group in the center, or the liberal group on the other side?

Well, clearly we see there's something important of such an intercession from Jesus' words is that this unity is not going to be easy.

And so I'm truly blessed to be a part of a group here at Steel Valley Church that adheres to the apostolic message as proclaimed, and every, and our entire church body is shaped by that, and the culture can't say one thing to change the way that we view the apostolic message.

It is supreme, it's authoritative, it's sufficient, there's nothing we can add or take away, and I'm glad to be a part of that group. But all around us, church by church, one by one, it's as if there's compromise over compromise over compromise, and all of a sudden you're over here on this side and you just, one compromise after another to unify in the name of unity, but really it's just compromise, and all of a sudden you don't even have a, you have a crossless Christianity is what you have.

[31 : 47] And so I'm glad that we don't have that problem, I don't foresee that problem coming anytime as long as there's air in my lungs. But the very intercession that Jesus is praying for will naturally yield divisions.

And that's something to understand. Because in the process of unifying a church under, as one body, under a chief shepherd, it's going to come at the cost of dividing people.

But it's dividing what was meant to be divided. Truth and error. What is truth? What is false? Just as light splits the darkness into two, so does the word of God split what is false into two as well.

And so you have division. But that might be exactly what Jesus Christ is getting at here as he's praying for the future church to preserve the apostolic message.

Jesus Christ is in praying for the church to just get along and coexist with everyone and their neighbors in order so that you get to the point of having a Christless cross, to get along to the world that literally hates us, to appeal to the culture in order to maybe get a promotion at work or maybe be liked by certain people groups and things like that.

[33 : 13] Jesus is in praying for us to just get along. He's praying for us as a future church to stand firm and stand united on the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone.

So how do we, an evangelical church, fundamental or conservative, however you want to label us, Christian church today, stand out and stand firm around so many churches that seem to be compromising one after another after another.

But the key is to stand out and stand firm without looking like a bunch of religious jerks, right? And that you have the message that they don't, so, you know, heaven's going to have a special golden entrance for you and a little welcome kind of like LeBron James going out on the courts, right? No. Unity is able to be achieved by simply being achieved by what Jesus says it will be achieved by, standing firm on the truth.

And however that arranges itself will arrange itself. So Steel Valley Church is not only a church, is not the only church around the block as your change in your wallet can, change in your pocket can attest.

[34 : 29] So how does unity unite or divide with others around? Well, one thing is that heaven, when we get to heaven, when we're talking about the future glory, they're not going to have fences of, yeah, you Baptists will go over here, you guys can immerse yourselves in water and you and your little signs and symbols, Baptists, and you'll have the Presbyterians on the other side of the fence and they'll smoke their cigars and they'll, no, I don't know, I don't want to caricature them, but they do like cigars from what I gather.

And infant baptism and things like that, all those fence and dividing lines, all having to do with non-essentials.

What is going to await us in the future as one body under one chief shepherd is going to be a fenceless reality. There's going to be no fence.

And so if we're intending to look ahead and be the glory of God in this life to an unbelieving world that doesn't look more confused than the world's confusion of gender or identity or sexuality, if we want to actually have an answer for what they're looking for, we ought to be able to distinguish the fences that we're putting up in this life that Scripture never erected, right?

And so we know that Christian unity can only be made possible within a relationship with Jesus Christ alone. That's the foundation. Jesus is not only praying for Steel Valley Church, but guess what?

[36 : 03] Yeah, the people around the corner that are assembling in a certain way in a religious tradition that are believing in Jesus Christ, yeah, they'll be in heaven one day too. But they don't look, act, or think like us and they might baptize children, all non-essential to the Christian faith.

The whole of Christianity isn't going to fall if you baptize somebody fully immersed or baptize a baby as an infant. It's just not something that will determine if you're a Christian or you're not.

And so the old saying is true, is that when you look at things in the lens of spiritual maturity, you're able to see the truth in such a phrase as this, in essentials, unity, in non-essentials, liberty, in all things, charity.

And this is a profound saying that really hints at Christian maturity because we're not just sitting around as doctrinal watchdogs over our neighbors.

We're not on social media and looking, prowling around like a lion. The devil is pretty good at that. The church should not be necessarily doing that.

[37 : 24] But if issues are brought up, we should address them as a church. But we're not splitting hairs over interpretive passages of New Testament, of Pauline theology, of how the church ought to assemble and ecclesiological, things like that.

So those are important not to divide the church on. But so many churches do. Churches will often take what is non-essential and all of a sudden make things essential.

And in so doing, you adopt a form of legalism when all of these things are disbanding fellowship from other Christian brothers and sisters around the world. And guess what?

You look like a theological jerk in doing it. It doesn't advance the gospel at all. I'm with D.A. Carson, Dr. Carson, when he says, unity is not achieved by hunting enthusiastically for the lowest common theological denominator, but by common adherence to the apostolic message.

And I would rest on that statement as well. If we look around, we'll see other Christians out on the streets reaching Youngstown for Jesus Christ, sweating and laboring often harder than we are because during the week we can come up with every excuse of the hard day at work and things like that where we can't go on the street of the north side here and evangelize.

[38 : 51] I mean, you've had a crazy week, right? And you're tired, but all the while you've got other denominations proclaiming Jesus Christ's name, showing the hope of the gospel on very violent

street corners within Youngstown week after week after week and sweating harder than us.

And yes, some of them overemphasize non-essentials of the faith like spiritual gifts and things like that, but they're not sacrificing cows on behalf of atonement for their sin.

There's essentials and there's non-essentials. And yes, some non-essentials can lead to essentials, but we're not talking about banning alcohol because it could get you drunk. We're talking about plain and simple apostolic message of who Jesus Christ is and what Jesus Christ has done on this earth.

Consider the most embarrassing point. If it were even any stretch of reality, consider the time in eternity when we might look back upon our time here on earth and when we look at people who have made it to heaven, we'll probably be surprised at some people who have entered into heaven, right?

But how embarrassing it would be for a moment in eternity to look back upon our time on earth and realize how much time we spent at dividing rather than coming together.

[40 : 14] How much more we could have been doing to come together as an apostolic rooted church with other apostolic ministries that are proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ to save and win the souls for the lost.

How much more we could have got done? So as we look at this year in simple closing, I pray that we are exuding in spiritual maturity.

And we're not just looking for every area that might be a flaw in other people, but we might be looking at the glory in other people just as we see the glory in one another.

Jesus Christ being the only way of salvation. And so spiritual maturity would say for me as a pastor, for instance, that there's churches that I wouldn't encourage you to go trust the discipleship process of different organizations, but it doesn't mean that I wouldn't lock arms with them on the streets to reach the neighborhoods for Jesus Christ.

That's a whole different story. That's missional efforts. But when you're talking about discipleship, when you're trying to learn and grow in holiness and learn who God is, that takes a little bit of discernment of what is most helpful.

[41 : 32] I'm going to be responsible for holding accounts of each and every one of you who is members of Steel Valley Church, not the other church. So as a shepherd over a body that God has entrusted to me, I have to be diligent to protect and guard your sanctification and discipleship.

That's just maturity. And so essentials, unity. Jesus Christ is fully God, fully man. Jesus Christ came. He lived. He died.

He was buried. He rose. He's coming back again. The Bible, it's authoritatively God's word. There's no revelation that we can add to that word. There's no revelation that we can take away and create a denomination because we got the answer now.

We rest upon the essentials that we unify on the five solas of the reformation of grace alone, faith alone, Christ alone, scripture alone, the glory of God alone.

And then in non-essentials, liberty, millennial views, how Jesus Christ is going to return, views on politics, whether you're on this side or this side, spiritual gifts, flags, dancing during music time, flutes and lyres, styles of music, fog machines, all of these things secondary.

[42 : 50] Who would have thought I'd be mentioning fog machines today about 20 years ago? It's a thing. Non-essentials, liberty. I won't agree with those things, but it's not essential to the Christian faith of what it means to be saved and in all things charity.

Truth will naturally divide. It doesn't need any help from us. It doesn't need our attitude or opinions or things like that. When we proclaim the truth, the truth is truth and we proclaim the truth regardless of how other people view it.

It's going to divide and it's going to do its work of returning what is due to it to return. As Isaiah says, it will return. It will never return void.

And so we can charitably handle ourselves with convictional charity. So Jesus wants the church to ask today in all that we do, whether it's in discipleship, whether it's in missions, what does the Bible say?

What does the apostolic body say about this? And also, this will propel how we instruct others, other churches that may vary in non-essentials.

[43 : 59] Like I said, they're not sacrificing cows, but if they are sacrificing cows for the atonement of their sin, how much more prone should we be to go and minister the gospel to them, not create

this borderline and this fence of division?

This is what it means to be united in Christ and allowing that unity to divide what it will divide. We're globally laboring together as one, allowing the apostolic message to gather together and others of whom God intends for it to gather.

And with that, I'd like to take a moment and pause and pray. and maybe at times today just asking for forgiveness of where we have maybe built walls that scripture never built.

Maybe God wants to build bridges where we've built walls. Maybe God wants to break down walls that we've built for our brothers and sisters around the community. I don't think it's any coincidence that we have Rick here playing guitar.

This seems like a providential time that God knew that we would be here in the message and has arranged a couple details in our worship service today to make something clear that we are one.

[45 : 21] We are, it's not just Steel Valley Church. We're gonna get some things wrong. Hopefully it's all non-essentials. But if it's essentials, we repent and we turn to God.

We turn back to God. So let's focus on our hearts today. Worship team will come up and let's just spend some time in prayer and self-evaluation. Please join me.

Thank you.