

6/6/21 - 1 Thes. 5:25-28 - “Gospel Unity”

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn our attention to the Word of God as we finish our last sermon. It's kind of bittersweet in the book of 1 Thessalonians. Maybe that's actually good news to you. You're excited that we're getting to the end of the book, so we're on to something new. But it has been a book that has challenged me in various different facets. And I know from conversations that has challenged many of us in our faith and corrected some teaching that we've received in our lives and kind of readjusted, realigned what the Bible actually is communicating to us and that it truly is the Word of God. And so we're going to continue with a sermon titled, Gospel Unity.

So for any note takers, I think it'll be up on the screen. Gospel Unity. That's an interesting concept, don't you think? If you think hard enough about those two words put together, Gospel Unity. It's very interesting because it makes you think about that in different realms. And so I want us to think about this in two different realms, a macro level and a micro level of what that means. From a macro level, kind of looking at the world at large, the various different beliefs, the various different spiritual dispositions, the various different religions that exist out there. To think of the hard lines in which this scripture, inerrant scripture, sufficient word, authoritative word, does and it draws upon truth and error.

To say Gospel Unity, it informs quite an ironic outcome. Because often the concerns of truth and error result in division, not unity, but division. But could it be then that when we refer to Gospel Unity, might it bring to mind sort of this winnowing effect? If you remember back in our Ruth series of winnowing, of the threshing floor, of throwing the chaff up in the wheat and the chaff up in the air and the chaff gets blown away, the wheat falls to the ground, they harvest the wheat. Could this be a winnowing process? And the means and the mode in which this unity is achieved is actually produced through that winnowing, through that divisive process, dividing truth and error. So let's just put it simple to think about Gospel Unity from a macro level at large. If you were to say that you would get all the people who think that they are religious or spiritual, if you were to gather them in one location and have them all standing and give them instructions to sit down if you do not agree with a certain statement. And so the whole everyone in the world representing the entire world is standing within a location and in all in agreement, complete unity until some statements are made. First statement being that there is only one true God. I would believe that you would see a wave of heads suddenly drop down to their seats, that they do not agree with that. You'd say another statement, Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. More heads would suddenly disappear. And quite a doozy of one, Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, to be made right with God, to be reconciled with God.

I believe that that would be quite a tidal wave of heads dropping down to their seats, all because of the Gospel. So you see, unity at the expense of sound doctrine, with all those heads up, is not unity at all. It's actually compromise. Unity of the Gospel can only come at the expense of a divided end, but a proper unity is achieved through that process, a winnowing process.

[4 : 3 2] Now, these are obviously concerns. Each one of those statements that I mentioned that those heads would drop down, those are all essential doctrines. Those are things that we, the hills, we fight and we battle, we die on as Christians. You cannot be a Christian without those three specifics. And there's many more, but for the sake of time, and I think for the sake of the illustration, you get what I'm trying to communicate. Now, I'm not against denominationalism, but many denominations have sprung out of this winnowing process, that there has been a compromise of sound doctrine for the sake of unifying and being acceptable to culture and society.

But I do believe that God has providentially broken the church down into small groups in denominations of like-minded individuals who many align with essential doctrines, and that's why we're assembled in this way. It's better care. You have more pastoral care. I know each and every

one of us in this room, and that's what God intended for his church. So in order to break us into small groups for shepherding aspects, he's created denominations for that. Now, if we zoom in a little bit to a micro level, we got the macro level, unity, that's truth and error. Now, if we go into these small groups, we're going to look past the local church, and we consider gospel unity at that level. We magnify those who unify upon those essential truths and look past denominations. We look past orders of service, their views on baptism, and we find various different small groups in various locations. And here in Thessalonica, we find Paul writing to a small group, a church known in the church of Thessalonica. And so here Paul is encouraging in our passage today for this church to remain unified in the gospel that has rallied them in the first place. Being a church unified with sinful members can often be ruthless at times. This can often propose challenges in maintaining their sights upon the one thing that matters, is the gospel that unifies the church, their small group. So we can often offend each other. We can annoy each other. We can hurt each other. We can often neglect each other. These things come natural to us. We have to work at the fruits of the Spirit by the grace of God. And all the while, we sort of just gather as a church, and sometimes we put on the fake smile, the fake wave, and the fake greeting saying, oh, I'll pray for you. And then upon leaving that person, you're like, I'll pray for your demise. And this is, I mean, this is life. I don't think I have to be stretched out from this aspect if we want to be real. Maybe not their demise. Maybe that's a little harsh. But, you know, like, yeah, I'll pray you get a flat tire. That might be a little bit more appropriate. That brand at Youngstown Metro, he's telling this church, can you believe it? But isn't it pretty close to home today, even in our culture and our society? We offend, we annoy, we hurt, we neglect very often. And this can lead to superficial love. This can lead to superficial unity. However, what the gospel of Jesus Christ does is govern and it guides our attitudes, our actions, to help us in our corporate witness to make it become something that we experience corporately, that which is going on Monday through Saturday outside of our gatherings. And then when we gather, we boldly proclaim, great is our guard. This isn't superficial unity. And we're going to talk about that in just a moment. But as we wrap up the 1 Thessalonians book series, this is message 18 in this short five-chapter book. I've gone a little wild, I must admit, with diving into this, but I do feel led by the Holy Spirit to do that for us in this church. I believe that it's proving its fruit tenfold. And so as we wrap this series up, I pray that this series doesn't end here, if you know what I mean. I pray that this series continues in the years ahead, the decades ahead. And today, I pray that this will be compelled by a capstone emphasis upon this book upon who we are and who we, who God intends us to become. So I challenge all of us today, as we enter into these last few verses in this chapter, let us strip off our fake, superficial piety and repent of our failings and take up the call of gospel unity at our micro level here at Youngstown Metro Church on the corner of Wick and McGuffey.

And just as the church in Thessalonica was called to do. Let's pray as we begin our time and petition our great sovereign God to help us at this time as we turn to his word.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for this gathering. Thank you for your word. And I thank you for the the soul fact that you don't need me, but you have desired to allow lips to proclaim your word.

[10:41] The very words from this page come to life through servants. So, Father, help me be a diligent servant of your word, an under-shepherd of the chief shepherd. And, Father, help me to unreservedly proclaim your word regardless of if it offends us or doesn't feel comfortable.

Father, we know your word regardless of the rough edges that it has within the gospel. We ought not to sand it down the rough edges or minimize the sharpness of such a word.

Father, we come to you asking for help in understanding and taking and becoming a people of your treasured possession.

And we thank you for gathering us here today for that purpose. We praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

That was quite a lengthy introduction, but I believe that it will help us in our time as we conclude this book.

We're going to be breaking this up into two sections today. And there's going to be two heart checks. The first heart check being that of corporate prayer and affection.

[12:02] Verse 25 says, Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

As Paul provides his final remarks to this church, he begins to end with a final exhortation, a final command and encouragement concerning their prayer life and their mutual affection.

In similar structure at the beginning of this letter, if anybody can go back 18 Sundays ago to the beginning of this letter, Paul ends with the exact emphasis that he began.

Christian brotherhood, Christian sisterhood, unity. He says in verse 25, brothers, and some translations make this to say sisters, brothers and sisters, pray for us. this is a command for the church to intercede on behalf of their leaders. And if you're interceding on behalf of their leaders, you're interceding on behalf of their strength, on behalf of their work, and on behalf of their obedience to the word.

[13 : 25] And so by way of implication and the imitative example that Paul gave to this church in Thessalonica, he is saying to do as I do and say as I say. Now I'm the most hypocritical person.

I often, especially it reveals itself at home with my kids. I tell my kids to put their shoes over here where all the shoes go. And when I enforce that rule, they're like, well, dad, your shoes are here too.

And I'm like, yeah, touche. You got me, son. I'm a work in progress as well. And there's all many different ways of saying do as I do and say as I say as small as shoes in the hallway.

And Paul has been saying this, not in a hypocritical manner, but in a practical manner that Paul is actually doing something and he's saying something and he's telling the church in Thessalonica to pay attention to it.

Three times in this letter, Paul has informed the Thessalonians of his prayers for them. In chapter one, verse two, he mentions them continually in his prayers, he says.

[14 : 37] In chapter three, verse 12, he prays both for the overflowing of their love and for the strengthening of their hearts in holiness.

And just a couple of verses ago, in verse 23 of chapter five, he prays for their complete sanctification. In the Pauline fashion of imitation, he is calling for this church to ingrain the importance of prayer within Christian fellowship and specifically a united relationship with their leaders in gospel unity, this being expressed through prayer.

But we have to think about this for a moment, looking at the micro level of gospel unity, isn't this sometimes the most challenging endeavor to pray for your leaders?

I mean, honestly, those pesky leaders at Youngstown Metro, they told me something that I don't want to do. They told me that I need to change something in my life that I don't want to change. who do they think they are? Well, maybe not yet. Save yourself because we still have a lot more sermon to go through. Maybe at the end of this you'll change your mind. But it is through the mode of prayer that we are corporately humbled with our brothers and sisters in sharing the interest of others.

[16 : 10] And that being a gospel interest regardless of our feelings and how we think that we think we ought to do things. And we've been saying something throughout this series that if it's true for Paul, it's true for all.

It's true for Paul, it's true for all. We started adopting that when we were talking about imitation. And so our prayer lives should be fully committed to the concerns of others regardless of our direct benefit from them being answered.

These are selfless prayers. Think for a moment. Paul, right at this moment, he's out in Athens. He's not able to be with the church in Thessalonica and he's saying to pray for him.

So in order to do that, they're praying for not something that they're benefiting from. They got Timothy at this time to shepherd them, to work with them. Paul's out in Athens and Paul is saying to, I know you want me there, but pray for me because God is still continuing to work somewhere else.

So this has no strings attached to it. We don't pray for people for the sake of their applause or their approval or their affirmation. We pray because God has called us to pray selflessly and be committed to that.

[17 : 28] And this is a look behind our lives, sort of behind closed doors, obviously. We don't parade around and say, I'm praying for you and I'm praying for you. I mean, it's good to encourage people, but this is the actual act of praying.

Paul is looking behind closed doors right now, but Paul continues on this other aspect of this passage in verse 26 of a more visible display of that gospel unity being manifested in the church's midst.

Look with me at verse 26. It says, greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss.

This is how that shared interest behind closed doors where nobody can see you being a prayer warrior on someone else's behalf.

This is the action that takes on form. This is the action that takes on bones and blood and skin and affection for one another. Now, a holy kiss was a family matter.

[18 : 34] And outside of that context, outside of family, even in Greco-Roman world, Judaism, it was often awkward. It was often considered abnormal to be conducted outside of that family matter.

But even married couples, it would be awkward for married couples to show public displays of affection. It was very strict, actually, in some of those cultures. And I wish it was sometimes strict in some cases in our culture today, like, you know, get a room, people, that we see out in public. But a holy kiss. The New Testament is unique in that it calls for the transformation of a simple kiss as being a sign in this passage of a community.

He tells this religious community, this Christian community, to greet each other with a kiss. And this type of sign would force this church, it would force us today, if we implemented it, to avoid discrimination.

It would teach us to die to our pride, to avoid the favoritism that can sometimes pop into our relationships.

[19 : 51] And as a physical gesture of that basis, Paul tells this church then to pucker up. you guys are going to be unified. And it's going to be made very known to all the watching world through a simple kiss.

Now, I've got to say, I mean, if you put the wrong preacher in a pulpit, you might have some real awkward application from a passage like this. I mean, how do you, I mean, this might be used as how you reach the lost or how you lose the reached.

I mean, you might have church members like, yeah, I'm out. You know, you were up to that point, you were good, but no, I'm not turning to my neighbor and doing that. But I believe what is most important to understand is the heart, a contextual heart of what Paul is getting at at this point.

In verse 26, it's simply that when Christians get together, they should greet each other affectionately. That affection should be known.

It should be something that you walk into a room and you can sense that connectiveness. And that their verbal greeting should be made stronger by a warmer and more personal touch, by a culturally appropriate sign.

[21 : 14] I would say a handshake or a hug would suffice in our culture today. I think I just relieved a lot of people's anxiety. But this says that we are community.

We're not strangers. Strangers don't often hug, but community does. And I pray that we do hug in this church as a sign of that affection that we have that God has called us to.

Don't miss this church. Paul's concern is gospel unity within the fellowship of this church. church.

And in that he has commanded this church to allow this conviction to find itself in secret and also in public.

In secret through intercessory prayer on behalf of leaders. And if it's true for Paul, it's true for all. We should be interceding for everyone, including leaders. But we should also be greeting each other warmly when we are together.

Now, as important as these are, these things are and humbling as they are, we can still fall victim, though, of just simply going through the motions. Religious piety.

[22 : 28] Betraying one another just as Judas betrayed Jesus who greeted him with a kiss. We can kind of go through the motions when our actions are actually disconnected from the condition of our hearts.

and betraying one another. This is where the gospel is needed in that unity. This is where the gospel is needed in that unity.

Unfortunately, in the church, prayer becomes an empty promise, a religious facade, an empty, I'll pray for you, or a complete blatant lie of telling somebody that we've been praying for you, knowing that you haven't hit, your knees have not hit the floor.

All for the sake of appearance. And then give a big hug. I mean, prayer meetings are sparsely attended, and we come into church late, we leave early. Why?

Why would this be so in a church that should be marked in gospel unity, both in private and corporately together for all to see?

[23 : 36] The heart of gospel unity is living for the concerns of others, because that is God's concern for you. You have to remember the gospel. He gave his only son to come to this earth, to reach down in the history, and live a life that in obedience with his word and the commandments to

fulfill the law, and to die a death upon the cross, and every drop of blood that was shed from his body was atonement for your sin.

You don't need to do bulls and goats anymore. Full atonement through Jesus Christ's blood, and his church responds to that by faith in that sacrifice.

Faith in it. The heart of gospel unity is living for the concerns of others, because God's concern is that for you.

Paul realized this, and reinforced the points in verse 27, that governs and guides our attitudes and affections to guard us from religious piety, just going through the motion, and lead us to a vibrant gospel, united community.

So we must dig deeper than what's going on in private, and what's going on in public, because that can also lose its touch. Our actions can be disconnected from our hearts, so we have to dig deeper in our heart check.

[25 : 13] So the second and final heart check in the final section of this book, we see the heart check of corporate proclamation and grace.

And Paul concludes his letter to this church at this time. I put you, he says in verse 27, under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Paul is not simply giving moralistic instruction how to be better people and things like that.

He is showing them how the church should exist. Specifically, who they are and how to become who God intends them to be.

Paul uses quite a gripping language here, and I don't want you to miss it in the passage. He says, I put you under oath. This is a Greek word, enorkizo.

[26 : 24] And this means to adjure or demand that someone take an oath as to the truth of what is said, or as to the certainty that someone will carry out the request or the command.

Enorkizo. Adjuring is more so that the person speaking is imploring in verse 27 specifically, and not necessarily in position or command or exhortation or insisting that, like we saw from verse 12 leading up all the way to this point.

He did not enorkizo the prayers of this church just previously in the verse. He did not enorkizo the affection of this church through a holy kiss, but he did enorkizo put an oath under the preaching. You see, it is through the preaching that man is silent and God speaks. Man is silent and God speaks.

If God speaks, his people ought to listen, to hear. And if he has enorkizo the preaching, I could imagine that hearing is just as vital.

[27 : 48] Because God's word, as Isaiah 55 says, it goes out and it doesn't return void of the proper fruit that it was meant to harvest. This verb, adjourn, is not easily translated in English, but it could be understood as Paul saying, I hereby make you responsible before God.

As if you yourself have taken an oath. We often get into our marriages and things of that nature where you take oaths, you take vows to one another.

And those vows are not optional, regardless if you feel like it or not. Those vows are taken with you until death. Now, he is saying, I hereby make you responsible before God as if you yourself have taken an oath.

He says, I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters, everyone. The most memorable usage of such a word is found from the mouth of a Jewish high priest when he tells Jesus in Matthew 26, 63, that I charge you, says the Jewish priest to Jesus, I charge you under oath by the living God.

Are you the Messiah? Are you the Son of God? This Greek verb is actually very unusually strong and very significant as it binds each and every word within this entire book.

[29 : 34] What this word does is it empowers and gives authority to the whole. This oath obligates a course of action, and in this case, that this letter be read aloud.

And if it's read aloud, we ought to hear what is being read aloud. Now, if a command is to be carried out, it is due to the submission of the word of God.

Not man. Not man's ideas. Not man's, you know, pulling Harleys up on stage and winning people, like, getting them into buildings and everything. Not words and pragmatism of man, but simply the word of God, as we have here.

And that a Christian ought to obey it. Every motive, every action, every affection is in submission to the authority of the word of God. To enarchizo, the preaching, all contained within it, is raised in authority and is used to govern and guide his church.

Wow. Right? This letter contains some of the most strongest teaching in Scripture of Christian holiness.

[30 : 51] And that road from here until the not yet, being with Christ and for eternity. We saw this in chapter 4, verse 1. Thessalonians, we saw it in Thessalonians, growth and sanctification lies within their hands.

We saw in chapter 4, verse 3. The Christian principle, goal is holiness. Striving in life and looking forward to that completion.

We saw in chapter 4, verse 8. The result of accepting or rejecting God's command. And just a couple weeks ago in verse 6, 6 and 8 of chapter 5.

Believers who understand, that believers who understand their own nature must live according to it. And just looking at what was read earlier in the sermon today, this oath governs our prayers.

This oath governs our greeting. And it actually, if you want to get real, this oath self-governs itself. Because Scripture interprets Scripture.

[31 : 57] We don't need some other tool outside of the Bible in order to understand it better. It's just not biblical. And if this oath governs our prayers for others, it governs our attitudes.

If this oath governs our greetings towards others, it governs our affections for others. And if this oath self-governs itself and its message, then it governs gospel unity.

The root of gospel unity begins in preaching the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. So help me, God.

That is the oath Paul is giving. A church clearly exuding in gospel unity is one excelling in letting the word of God speak.

And in so doing, the direction of that word is to everyone. It's with preservation of apostolic authority, meaning that it's sound.

[33 : 01] It's not taking away. It's preserving. It's sound. It's good preaching. And it's also for the end of the church spiritual well-being. It will then be quite a promising reward for those who submit to that, isn't it?

Great promise in your sanctification to those who submit their lives to this word of God that Paul's final word to them will assuredly be manifested within the hearts and lives of God's people.

And he finishes his letter with that of a signature. It's so beautiful. We use sincerely, we use our different things in Christ's word, yours truly.

Paul ends this letter with a signature in verse 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. It is by grace we have been saved.

and it is by reciprocation of that grace that the church is bound to Jesus Christ. Not just in lip service of religious piety, not in legalism, but by his lordship over our lives.

[34 : 21] Governing lordship as the word of God takes root. And it is through the Lord Jesus Christ that is the basis for Christian obedience.

And it is obedience that we seek as we await the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. This is the pursuit of holiness, church.

Grace was known as Paul's signature in many of his letters. He would end with grace and may that be the signature of our lives as well. Grace that be apparent as we take on gospel unity, as we forgive one another, as we go about these various trials in life and our relationships.

Let that be the signature in our midst. This is gospel unity. As we survey our lives and commit our lives to Jesus our Lord. If a local church desires to experience this gospel unity, it must not only receive the gospel and pass it on, but it must embody it in the community life and mutual love of prayer and affection or attitudes.

Nothing but the grace of Christ can accomplish this church. May grace be the signature in our lives. And so, as we come to a close, we have some things to make of this.

[35 : 47] We have some challenges that I believe are challenging to me as I surveyed my own life. And man, I wish a preacher would have preached this message to me maybe five, six years ago because I was just kind of doing the motions.

I was missing our gatherings. I didn't prioritize the church very much. But if our eyes are to be focused upon which lays waiting ahead, if that is our focus, as Paul is trying to shift our focus

forward, then when we look around this room, we should see a glimpse of heaven, of what it's going to be like at that time.

But if it's true that we are bound to offend one another, if we're bound to annoy, aggravate, hurt, even feel neglected by one another, then it is through the continuous reconciliation, continuous grace upon grace, the continuous charitableness, the continuous assuming the best in one another, that our glimpse of heaven can continuously be restored in this life.

This looks like peace with one another. This looks like patience with one another. This looks like goodness towards one another. This looks like faithfulness towards one another. gentleness towards one another. Self-control with one another. Sometimes more so with different characters like me.

[37 : 32] But all of which can be surmised in this life to come. But here we get glimpses of that. God has enortized his word to be proclaimed for his hearers and doers.

Here at Youngstown Metro Church, we are an intentional church family devoted to the hearing of God's word and the doing of God's word. So then it is true that the level of progress in our doing will rise or fall upon our hearing.

Church, are you hearing today? Are you hearing over the past month? Are you hearing over this entire 18 message series?

Or like Hebrews 10 25, are we neglecting to meet together which is a habit for some as the author says. Is staying connected with one another sort of like selective upon the people that you like?

I ask you to repent of this because this is not gospel unity. It's not. Repent and be committed to the hearing which results in doing.

[38 : 52] The hearing, the doing, the preaching has been enarchezed, so must the hearing of that oath. I mean, you got to think, an entire week has 168 hours in it.

About 80 to 100 of those are probably intermixed between working and sleeping, depending on if you're an avid sleeper, maybe a couple more, or if you have newborn children, maybe quite a bit less, but 80 to 100.

And so that leaves you with about 70 to 90 available hours within the week. But for some reason, one and a half hours on Sunday morning is sometimes such a burden to endure.

Sometimes a Bible study is difficult to attend for some reason. A prayer meeting, a prayer walk at YSU for an hour, you decide to sleep in.

You know, the doctor has given us, the chief doctor has given us the medicine that we need. And we are such stubborn people. He is saying, I have it here for you.

[40 : 00] It's available through the preaching of the word every Sunday morning. And it's available to you in Bible studies, in one-to-one Bible readings. And God is saying, go sign up, get involved, because it only takes, honestly, probably a week or two of missing church that you start feeling like, yeah, this kind of live stream gig is pretty good.

I don't need that. But all of a sudden, you start seeing your marriage being suffering from that, your parenting being suffering from that, and all things within your life, for some reason, there's something behind the gathered church that God has prescribed for us, something that is good for us.

And sometimes we don't want to take those horse pills. And we don't want to take what the doctor is prescribing to us, and we resist it. We ought not to fall for that.

Satan, the lion that prowls around like a roaring lion devouring those who he can devour is very cunning, and he will do whatever it takes to keep you from God speaking to you in our corporate gatherings.

So various things in life can find themselves in contrast to an oath that Paul has been commissioned to be anorchizo, to be preached of the word.

[41 : 22] I think our house projects could probably be postponed around one and a half hours on Sunday morning. I think that sometimes those errands that we sometimes prioritize, that we have to get ready all morning for errands, we have to do these errands, I think they can wait.

Sometimes even family can wait in this life for something that God has anorchizo'd as an oath that is good for us, obviously with various situations, unless there's a death of a family member or illness, I'm not a complete monster, but God will honor your obedience to that.

You see, Christian life is church life. This is what gospel unity is all about. God has set your calendar.

If only you'd pay attention to the reminders in your calendar, it's a windowing reality even at this micro level because we see people who claim that they're Christians but they never go to church, they're in and out, we don't hear from them and things like that.

It's windowing from a micro level. God has ordained this. He has anorchizo'd this. So the goal of the Thessalonian church as we close is eschatologically focused.

[42 : 45] It's eschatologically oriented in the end time of what lays waiting ahead for us as the bride of Christ. To be holy, to be together in this life until Christ appearing.

And church, may that be so in our church family, our church gathering here as Youngstown Metro Church as an intentional church family. For the many years to come, the many decades to come. Let's pray. Thank you.