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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes

INTRODUCTION

I would like to acknowledge a very special guest who is here today. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is here. He said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I'm right there in the midst." Choir, thank you for singing to Him. There are songs that we sing *about* Jesus and those are good, but that is absolutely one we sing *to* the Lord. Please open your Bibles now to Romans 15.

Today I want to show you what the word of God says about the beauty of unity. The reason I'm preaching on that is simply because I preach through the Bible verse after verse, and this section is all about the beauty of unity.

Many of you are aware that this past year the State of Minnesota elected as their governor a professional wrestler, Jesse "The Body" Ventura. Some of you are also aware that just recently he caused some waves by some comments he made in a national magazine where he said, "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers." First of all, organized religion: That's an oxymoron, actually. I've never seen any organized religion. If he is talking about religion in terms of that effort of man to try to find God, I would tend to agree with him. But if he's talking about what I call the real Christian life, having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, I disagree with him violently. But I don't want to fight him. If it is indeed a crutch, if Jesus is a crutch, my response is, "Give me two of them," because He is more than a crutch to me. He is life, and I need him desperately.

Isn't it sad so many people think the Christian life is just some religion? He also says, "They seek strength in numbers." I admit I'm guilty of that. I love to come here every Sunday and gather with numbers of people who love and who worship Jesus the way I do. You know why? Because the Bible says that expresses the unity of the body of Christ.

Would you look with me here in Romans? I really want us to turn back to 14:1 and read that verse before we go to 15:1, because 14:1 introduces this whole subject. "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (those nonessentials in the Christian life that Christians so often argue about).

Now, having said that, turn on over to 15:1-6, and let's pick up with the text today, because he continues this discussion. "We who are strong," you see, Paul considered himself to be a strong, mature believer; of course, that kind of strength is relative, because we are all weak, compared to God. "Ought to bear, [that word means carry] with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written: [here's a quotation from Psalms 69] 'The insults of those who insulted you [meaning God] have fallen on me.' For everything that was written in the past [that means the Old Testament] was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope."

Then Paul breaks out in a prayer. "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. GOD'S PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

This morning I want to talk to you about the beauty of unity. I'm going to talk about two things. First of all, I'm going to talk about God's principle of unity. I don't want to spend much time on the topic of unity, because secondly, I mainly want to talk about how I can promote unity in my church. First of all, let's talk about unity. Let's learn three things about unity in the Bible.

1. Unity in diversity is beautiful

It is so beautiful, because we are such a diverse people. We act differently, look differently, and have different temperaments.

When you find all different people, like we have here at Green Acres Baptist Church, living together, loving together, one in Christ, that is what makes unity beautiful. That is why the Bible says in Psalms 133:1, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!"

I really like the Peanuts cartoon strip. In one of my favorites Peanuts specials, Linus is reclining on the floor watching television. Lucy walks in and says to him, "Change the channel right now." Linus says, "I was here first, why should I change the channel?" Lucy holds up her hand. She said, "You see these five fingers? Alone, they are nothing. But when I curl them into a fist, they become a weapon that is a terrible thing to behold." So Linus gets up and changes the channel. The next thing you see is Lucy reclining on the floor watching television, and Linus is over at the side looking at his hands, and he says, "Why can't you guys get together like that?"

I think sometimes when God looks at the church of the Lord Jesus, He is saying, "Come on, guys, why can't you get together? Why can't you work together?" The thing that makes the church such a positive impact in the world is the unity that we experience. The late, great preacher, Dr. Vance Havner used to say that Christians are like snowflakes. Individually, a snowflake is an insignificant thing, but when you put enough of them together, and it can shut down a town and stop traffic.

Individually, we may not be much. We may seem insignificant, but when you put us together in the body of Christ, we are powerful in this world, a power for the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Unity is *not* uniformity

A lot of people are confused about this. Some people think unity in a church is when everybody looks exactly alike, think exactly alike on everything, and even smell alike. They are just "cookie cutter" Christians. Everybody looks exactly the same. That is not what unity is.

The thing that makes unity miraculous is we are such a diverse people. We are unique. If you don't believe that God is a God of variety, look down the pew and see some of the faces He created. Nobody looks exactly the same except identical twins. Look at your forefinger. There in the swirl of the print on your forefinger is a design that is so unique that not one person among six billion on planet earth share that design. God is such a God of variety.

When people of different preferences, different tastes and different appearances come together in unity, it is beautiful. The thing I like about Green Acres Baptist Church is because I hope that we are a church like that and will always be a church where different folks experience unity, where the long hairs, the short hairs, and the no hairs love each other and get together; where the suit and tie crowd and the elegant dress crowd get along with the blue jean crowd, and nobody judges the other or makes the other feel bad; where the Ph.D.'s can sit on the same pew with a high school dropout and they will love and appreciate each other, where millionaires can sit next to someone on welfare and still hold hands and sing, "We are one in the bond of love."

Unity is the Beethoven crowd, Gaither crowd and the D.C. Talk crowd singing, "We are one in the bond of love." It is not everyone acting and looking the same.

3. We can't create unity—we can only keep it

Or disrupt it. We can either keep it or kill it, but we can't create it. Sometimes people say, "We've got to come together to create unity." No, man cannot make unity. Only God can. Look at Ephesians 4:3. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace." Our only job is to keep it. Only the Spirit can create it.

Man's efforts at unification never work. Sometimes you get a group of people together, and they meet and say, "That's unity." That is like taking two cats, tying their tails together and hanging them over a clothesline. You have unification, but there is absolutely no unity there at all. The act of people coming together is not unity. Only the Holy Spirit can do that. The problem arises when we, as Christians, get so self-centered and so narrow-minded that the only people we want to fellowship with are those who believe and think and feel exactly the way we do.

Some time ago, I read a book by Max Lucado called *A Gentle Thunder*. In it, he tells a story. Of course, it is not true, but it is funny to me, and it illustrates this point. Let me read it:

Sometime ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible. "Are you a believer," I asked him?

"Yes," he said excitedly. I've learned that you can't be too careful who you fellowship with, so I began to ask him some questions.

"Do you believe in the virgin birth?" I asked.

"I do," he said.

"Do you believe in the deity of Christ?"

"No doubt," he replied.

Could it be that I was face-to-face with a real Christian brother? Nonetheless, I continued my checklist. "Do you believe in the return of Christ?"

"I believe it is imminent," was his response.

"What about the Bible?"

"It is inspired," was his immediate answer.

I was getting excited. "Are you a conservative or a liberal?"

He was getting interested in me, too. "I'm a conservative."

I asked him as my heart began to beat faster, "What denomination are you a part of?"

He said, "I am a member of the Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God Dispensationalist Triune Convention."

I was excited, because that was my denomination. I asked him, "Which branch of that denomination are you?"

He said, "I'm a part of the pre-millennial, post-tribulation, non-charismatic, King James, one-cup communion branch."

My eyes misted over. That was my branch as well. I had only one other question. "Is your pulpit wooden or Plexiglas?"

"Plexiglas," he replied. I recoiled in horror. "Get away from me, you heretic," I said, as I walked away.

II. MY PROMOTION OF UNITY

Unity is from God. We can't create unity; we can only maintain it. I want to talk about my promotion of unity. There are some things that you and I can do practically to maintain, to promote, and to enhance the unity of our church. I call this "Six things you can do to promote unity." There are six verses in our text, and each verse tells us one thing we can do.

I promote the unity of my church when I:

1. Support weaker brothers

Please look at Romans 15:1 again, "We who are strong ought. . ." Ought comes from the Anglo Saxon word "owed." That means you and I have a debt that we ought to pay, that we owe to newer, weaker Christians to support them, to encourage them, even when they fail, even when they stumble, even when they don't believe what we believe about certain things, about these issues we are talking about. We are there to support them, not to judge or criticize them. Look at the word in verse 1. It says, "bear with the failings of the weak." It is a word that literally means to carry them, to pick them up and carry them.

Whenever you come home from the hospital with a newborn baby, you don't plop that baby down on the floor and say, "Okay, buddy, start walking." No, you carry that child, because that is a newborn baby. And even when the child gets a little older and starts walking, you do not take big steps, you take little bitty steps, because you are accommodating the baby.

The Bible says, that is what we do to younger, more immature Christians. We are to carry them, to walk slowly with them and help them. Where are we carrying them? We are carrying them to a position of maturity and strength. We don't just put up with them, but we are to carry them.

Sometimes Christians who have been saved for a long time mistake tolerance for support. In my former church, our teenagers got excited on a retreat, and they piled into the front pews of the church. You know what happened? Some of the folks suddenly lost "their" pew. One little lady came to me and said, "I'm pretty upset about it, but I'm not going to complain, because the Good Book says just grin and bear it." And I had to tell her, "No, ma'am, the Bible never says, 'Grin and bear it.'" Her attitude was, "I don't like it, but I'm just going to tolerate it." Tolerance is not

what we are talking about; we are talking about supporting, caring, encouraging, and helping younger Christians.

Look what Paul says in Galatians 6:1, "Brothers, if someone be caught in a sin or they fall and fail, you who are spiritual should kick them out roughly." That is not what it says, is it? It says, "We are to restore him gently, but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

One of the problems in churches today is that sometimes Christians just aren't very nice. We treat other Christians with antagonism. I heard about a little girl who prayed this profound prayer one night, "Dear God, please make the bad people good, and please make the good people nice."

Do you know why the world out there isn't filing into the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, why they are not running to Jesus? Because they see such disunity and division. Let me just tell you some of the things churches have split over. I know for a fact there are churches that have split over which side of the sanctuary the piano is being placed on. I know of churches that have split over whether or not they would have a kitchen in their facility. I know of churches that have split over whether or not they could build a gymnasium. I know of churches that have split over whether or not to use the King James Version of the Bible. I know of churches that have split over whether or not a woman could teach Sunday School. I know of churches that have split over whether or not they have percussion instruments. Churches have split over all kinds of things. When the world looks at that, they just laugh.

I could take you to a place in Alabama where on one side of a rural road, there is a church named New Harmony Baptist Church, and right across the street is another church called New Harmony Baptist Church No. 2. Do you know what happened? There wasn't much harmony in New Harmony. That church split, and a segment moved across the street and started New Harmony No. 2. What does that say to the world?

Outside of Mayfield, Kentucky, there is a church named No Peg Baptist church. You know how it got its name? Years ago, circuit preachers would ride their horses to the church, come inside, and they would have this outer garment that they wore when they were riding horses or on the buggy.

One man took it upon himself to put a wooden peg on the back wall of the church so the preacher would have a place to hang his outer coat. Some people were so upset about him desecrating the church that way that they pulled out. That church split over that issue. Today the church that was formed is still named No Peg Baptist church. When the world looks at that, they laugh at us. You see, the Bible says we are to support weaker Christians, even if they don't agree with us on some of these nonessential issues.

I promote the unity of my church when I

2. Seek to please others, not myself

Would you please look at verse 2 again? "Each of us should please his neighbor. . ." Look at the last part of verse one, ". . .not to please ourselves." You see the greatest enemy to unity in a

church is selfishness. "This is what I like. This is what I don't like. If I don't get pleased at church, I'm going to complain. If I'm not happy, I'm just not going to come back."

See, part of unity is, you try to please other people, and you don't try to please yourself. Some of you remember a few years before he died, Ricky Nelson, wrote and sang was a song that went like this, "Well, it's all right now, I've learned my lesson well. You see, you can't please everyone, so you've got to please yourself."

Did you know that is the attitude of so many people? "I can't please everybody, so I'll work on pleasing myself." That is foreign to the word of God. Christians, we don't try to please ourselves. We try to please our neighbors. Some psychiatrists or psychologists would say if you spend all of your life trying to please others, that is a psychological dysfunction. I'm not talking about in every case, this is talking about brothers and sisters in Christ. Other super-spiritual people would say, "I thought we were to be God-pleasers, not man-pleasers." Of course, we are. This just says to take your desires, your wants, your wishes, and set them aside for the sake of unity for others.

How about another song? You remember the great musical, Oklahoma? One of the songs goes, "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day. (Why is it beautiful?) I've got a wonderful feeling everything's going my way." Is that your criteria for a beautiful day, if everything goes your way? It seldom goes your way, does it? Better words would be, "Oh, what a beautiful morning, oh, what a beautiful day. I've got a wonderful feeling that everything's going to go God's way." Everything always goes God's way. When you get so self-centered that you want things to go only your way, you become an enemy of unity within your church.

When my girls were little, I used to read books to them. I can remember a particular nursery rhyme I read to them that to me was greatly profound. It went this way, "I had a little party, this afternoon at three. 'Twas very small, three guests in all, just I, myself, and me. Myself ate up the candy, and I drank up the tea. It was also me who ate the cake and passed the pie to me."

You know, that describes the perspective of so many people. They are just so self-centered that their whole existence is I, me, my. I have heard, I don't know if it is true, I have heard that there's a bird in South America called a Me-Me Bird, because it only has one song and that is, "Me-me, me-me, me-me." I don't know if it's true, but I'm afraid we've got a few in East Texas, and they are human. That is my pew. That's my parking place. I'm going to park in the visitor's parking place, because I've got just as much right to park there as they do. Some of you are thinking, "I hope so-and-so is here to hear that today." If you're thinking that, it's directed toward you.

I saw a t-shirt the other day. There's this big overweight guy, and he had on a t-shirt that said, "Filthy, stinking rich." Then it said, "Two out of three." Filthy and stinking. I'm afraid if some of us were honest, we would have to put on a shirt that said "Filthy, stinking and selfish," because when you don't care about anybody else, you disrupt the unity of the church.

I promote the unity of my church when I

3. See the unselfish example of Jesus

He says there in verse 3, "For even Christ did not please himself." Then he quotes Psalms 69. All that means is that Jesus himself was insulted, but he didn't try to please himself. He didn't try to retaliate or defend himself. He just kept doing what God wanted him to do. That's why Hebrews 12:2 says, "Christ is our goal, our vision, our example. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning the shame, and he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Did you know Jesus was insulted? While he was ministering on earth, they looked at Jesus, and they said, "Sure, you do miracles, but you do it by the power of Beelzebub." In other words, they said, "You do it by the power of a demon. You are demon-possessed." They called the Son of God "demon-possessed."

He didn't retaliate. You know why? Look at verse 3, "The insults of those who insulted you, God, have fallen on me." You know what else they said about Jesus? They said, "You are a glutton, a wine bibber, a friend of sinners and prostitutes." Did he try to defend himself? No. One day they said to Jesus, "We know who our father is." You know what they were implying? "You don't even know who your daddy is, son." In our vocabulary, we have a word for an illegitimate child, and I'm not going to say it. That's what they were saying about Jesus. "You illegitimate child, you don't know who your daddy is."

Jesus was insulted and insulted, and the even insulted Him when He was hanging on the cross. They said, "He saved others; Himself, he cannot save." It wasn't that he could not save himself; it was that he would not save himself. Don't you believe that Jesus could have called down twelve legions of angels and saved himself? But he didn't. You know why? He wasn't trying to please himself. He was doing what was best for you and me and for all sinners.

Even today on television, in the movies, and right in your school and job and neighborhood, there are people today who still insult Jesus. Every time that you hear someone name the name of Jesus as a profanity, when they get mad and say "Jesus Christ," they are still insulting him. Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that an all-powerful God, if He chose to do so, could cause a bolt of lightning to strike out of the sky and just vaporize everybody who takes the name of Jesus as a profanity? Do you believe He could do that? I do.

Some of you probably wish He would do that. You know why He doesn't? Because He is not trying to please Himself. He is trying to do what's best for others, because He loves even those who take the name of Jesus as an insult. He died for that person. He wants that person to repent and be saved and to know Him as Lord and Savior. What a wonderful example of unselfish love! He is our Example.

I promote the unity of my church when I

4. Accept the Bible as my source of authority

Now, hidden in this passage of scripture is one of the greatest verses in the Bible about the character and nature of the Bible itself. Look at verse 4 again. "For everything that was written in

the past [that means the Old Testament] was written [look at these four things the Bible doe]) to *teach us*, so that it gives us *endurance* and *encouragement* of the scriptures so that we might have *hope*.) That's what the word of God does.

You know what the basis of my unity with you is? It is that I believe that the Bible is the Word of God and you believe that the Bible is the Word of God. Because of that, that is the basis of our unity, because we are using the same source of authority. Listen to me. You don't have to believe exactly what I believe about the Bible. Please hear me now. Every word of this Bible is inspired. But I'm not going to stand up and tell you that every interpretation I have of the Bible is inspired and perfect. You may disagree with me on certain points of interpretation of the Bible. I believe certain things about the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and as long as you believe He is coming back, you may not believe those same details I do. You know what? I am going to love you, accept you, fellowship with you. I'm not going to say, "Get out of here," as long as we both say the Bible is the Word of God.

But hear me. If you come to be a part of our church and you say, "The Bible is just a book of history, just a book of fairy tales; it is not supernatural, the Bible is no different than a novel," there is no unity between us. You know why? That is one of those essentials where we cannot compromise. The Bible itself says in verse 4, "Everything that was written [not just parts of it]." What does the Bible say about itself? 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is blood breathed and useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking and training in righteousness." Every word of this book, God breathed on it and God breathes through it. It is alive. If when you read the Bible, particularly the Old Testament, do you go, "Boring"? You have not discovered the keys to understanding the Bible.

A number of years ago, I came to three keys for the Old Testament that made it come alive to me. The first key that opened the Bible to me was to know that *all* the Bible is about Jesus. Not just the New Testament. *All* the Bible. Genesis through Revelation, it is all about Jesus. Here is what you need to know. You see, the truth of Jesus is enfolded in the Old Testament; it is unfolded in the New Testament. The gospel is concealed in the Old Testament; it is revealed in the New Testament. The New Testament is in the old contained; and the Old Testament is in the new explained.

You may think you need to read the Bible like a novel, starting in Genesis and going all the way through and then study the New Testament. If you really want to appreciate and understand the Old Testament, you must get a grasp of the Old Testament first. It is all about Jesus. I say that because Jesus said it. He said to the Pharisees, "Search the scriptures. For these are they which do testify of me." He is talking about the Old Testament.

On the first Easter evening while he's walking to Emmaus with these two disciples, the Bible says, "And he showed them in all the scriptures (that is the Old Testament) the things concerning himself." Ladies and gentlemen, if you read the Old Testament and you don't find Jesus, you had better read it again, because somewhere in type, in prophecy, there you will find Jesus. When I learned that, it totally revolutionized the Bible for me.

Another thing that revolutionized the Bible for me was to understand that the events of the Old Testament have Christian applications. For instance, the Exodus, when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, is a picture of salvation. Those who came out of Egypt through the Red Sea, is a picture of salvation and baptism. There are many Christians today who are wandering in the wilderness. They have not entered into God's rest. I think that is the spirit-filled life and it is available to any Christian who enters into the promised land of God's rest.

You know what else I discovered? Much of the prophecy of the Old Testament is talking about the Second Coming of Jesus and the millennial reign of Christ on earth. For instance, if you don't know that, you'll read the books of Daniel and Ezekiel and scratch your head and say, "I don't know what that's about." When I read it, I want to jump, shout, sing, because it gets me excited about the Second Coming.

Do you accept the Bible as God's word? That is the basis of unity. This is not an unusual conversation, but I had it again recently. Someone was talking to me and said, "You know what I believe? I believe ultimately, everybody is going to be saved. The Buddhists, those in Islam, even those who are good but they don't have any religion of their own." I asked that person, "What is the basis of your belief?" You know what they said? They said, "I figured it out that that was the fairest thing for God to do."

Now, there are a lot of people that believe that, on the basis of their own intelligence. If they say that, they have elevated their own intelligence to the level of the authority of the Word of God.

I am not that smart. I don't trust the whole of eternity to these corpuscles between my two ears. I need something as my source of authority, and I have said, "This is it." That is the basis of our unity.

I promote the unity of my church when I

5. Pray for unity with in my church

That is what Paul did. Look at verse 5, "May the God who gives endurance [he's praying now] give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus."

Not long ago, I had a new member of Green Acres say to me, "One of the things I like about this church, it has more unity than any church I've ever been a part of." I said, "You know what, I agree." Thank God for the unity of Green Acres Baptist Church. But I added, "You know what? It hasn't always been this unified. After I came, this young, whippersnapper pastor made all these radical changes and some people didn't like it. But there were faithful people, and they faithfully asked God for unity."

I can remember this group of guys I pray with every Sunday morning, guys like Spencer Miller and Tom Lawson, on their knees Sunday mornings, praying, "God, give us unity," exactly what Paul is praying here. God give us unity. God is saying, "Here it is. I give it to you. Will you accept it?" Thank God, He has answered that prayer in our church. But let's keep praying, because the devil would like nothing more than to split this church or any church. The devil lives

to create division. He wants to put a wedge between every husband and wife, between every child and parent, between every church member and between every member of every Sunday School. He wants to divide. That's why we must keep on praying for unity.

The night before Jesus was crucified, look at what he prayed in John 17:23. Hours before the cross, he said, "Father, I in them [meaning in Christians] and you in me, may they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me, and you've loved them even as you've loved me." Jesus is still praying for the unity of this church, so we ought to pray for it. That is a Biblical thing to do.

The key, in verse 5 is, "as you follow Christ Jesus." Let me give you a little visual illustration. Look up here for a minute. I'm going to hang on to this pulpit right here. Mike, would you help me? Mike, I want you to try to get close to this pulpit, but don't get close to me. No, you're close to me. No, you're still close to me. Sorry, no, you're close to me. Get close to the pulpit, but don't get close to me. You say, "How stupid." He can't get close to the pulpit without getting close to me, because I'm close to the pulpit.

I want you to imagine that this pulpit symbolizes Jesus. Did you know that when I'm abiding in Jesus and I'm close to Jesus—come on Mike, you get close to Jesus. When he's close to Jesus and I'm close to Jesus, we're close to each other. Our unity is not based upon him being close to me. Our unity is based upon me being close to Jesus and him being close to Jesus.

You cannot claim to be close to Jesus and be divided from your brother and sister in Christ. And if you are divided from your brother or sister in Christ, one of you is not close to Jesus. That is why we pray for unity.

I promote the unity of my church when I

6. Join with others in praising God

Look what psalmist says in Psalms 34:3, "Glorify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together." Look at Romans 15:6, "So that with one heart and mouth, you may glorify the God and father of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Almost every day, I sing praises to the Lord, but I come together with you on Sunday. With one voice, we sing praises to the Lord. That promotes and enhances the unity of our church. When a lost person comes in the doors of this church, they sit down and they look around and see a thousand Christians in here singing praises to God. I want to tell you, that has an impact on them because with one heart and one voice, we are glorifying God together.

Dr. Jay Vernon McGee tells a funny story about a little community where there were three churches on the same corner, a Presbyterian church, Methodist church and Baptist church. One Sunday night, all the windows were open and they could hear each other singing. They didn't get along very well. The people in the Presbyterian Church were singing this song, "Will There be Any Stars in My Crown?" When they finished, the Methodist church sang, "No, Not One." Then the Baptists sang, "And That Will be Glory for Me." Jay Vernon McGee said that all three of

those churches ought to sit down together and sing the doxology of praise to God. That's what the world needs to see. They need to see us together. Jesus said, "When we come together, that's when the world knows that God has sent us."

Here is a sad, true story: A number of years ago in Canada, a little two-year-old girl wandered away from her neighborhood. It was a cold, winter day. Her parents alerted the neighbors and they saw some tracks in the snow, but there were a lot of other tracks, so for several hours the searchers went in all different directions calling her name. They didn't find her. A little before sunset one of the men said, "Instead of all working separately, let's join hands and form a long line and walk through the field together. That way we cannot miss a square foot." That's what they did. They joined hands and together walked as one long line calling that little girl's name. Tragically, they found her frozen body curled up. One of the men said with great anguish, "Oh, if we had only joined hands sooner."

There are people out there without Jesus. One reason they are going to hell is because we are in here debating over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, whether this little thing is right or wrong. What we need to do is join hands together and show them that Jesus is the answer.

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

1. Unity in diversity is beautiful

How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! *Psalm 133:1*

2. Unity is not uniformity

3. We can't create unity—we can only maintain it

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3

II. MY PROMOTION OF UNITY

I promote the unity of my church when I:

1. Support weaker believers (1)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. *Galatians 6:1*

2. Seek to please others—not myself (2)

3. See the unselfish example of Jesus (3)

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. *Hebrews 12:2*

4. Accept the Bible as my source of authority (4)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness ... *2 Timothy 3:16*

5. Pray for unity within my church (5)

"I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." *John 17:23*

6. Join with others in praising God (6)

Glorify the Lord with me; let us exalt his name together. *Psalm 34:3*