

INTRODUCTION

I really enjoy listening to a great symphony orchestra performing classical music. One of my favorite composers is Johann Sebastian Bach. His most famous composition was "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring." Here's a little bit of trivia about Bach that you might not know. Bach was often so engrossed in composing music that he wouldn't take time to eat lunch. This wasn't healthy, so his wife started packing a lunch for him to take to his studio. She would include a sandwich and some fruit. At lunch Bach would stop and eat the sandwich and fruit—so now you know where we got the term Bach's lunch!

The word "church" is one of the most important words in the New Testament; it appears over 100 times. The Greek word for church is *ecclesia*, which means literally means, "called out ones." Here's a little Bible trivia question for you: How many times does the word "church" appear in the four gospel accounts? If you answered "three" you would be correct. The first time Jesus used the word church was in Matthew 16 when He said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." The other two times "church" appears is in our passage today.

I'm calling this message "God's Beautiful Symphony," because the Greek word "*sum-phoneo*" is used in our text today. It's the word from which we get our English word symphony. The analogy of a symphony is a beautiful picture of the church. In an orchestra, there are many different kinds of instruments playing the same song. In the church of the Lord Jesus there are many different kinds of people, but we should all be playing the same music.

Matthew 18:15-20. "If your brother or sister sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he still refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 'I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.'"

Next Sunday morning, this stage will be filled with an orchestra and the choir loft will be full of singers as our Celebration Choir and Orchestra present "Hope of the World." Before the orchestra comes on stage, they gather in the orchestra room and Tim will play an F. Each orchestra member tunes his instrument to match that note. Few things are more beautiful than the sounds of a symphony orchestra playing in tune. In contrast, if you hear instruments that aren't in tune, it sounds like two cats fighting!

The church is like a symphony. When we're in tune, we make beautiful music together, but when we aren't, it can get ugly. Let's notice four different ways in which Jesus tells us how to tune up our lives.

1. GET BACK IN TUNE WITH SOMEONE WHO SINNED AGAINST YOU

When the members of the church are in tune with each other and with the Lord, the result will be a beautiful symphony. But that doesn't always happen. Jesus knew that there would be conflicts among Christians, that's why He gave us three simple steps to follow to bring about reconciliation.

Before we examine these three steps, there are several qualifications I need to insert. First, these steps are for believers, brothers and sisters in Christ. Second, these steps are for when another Christian has sinned against you personally, not sin in general. If you have a Christian friend who is heading off into sin, it's a good idea to lovingly confront them—but that's just using common sense and uncommon kindness. Jesus isn't giving you permission to be the moral police and confront every sin you see someone commit. The tense and voice of the verb indicates that these instructions apply when someone sins against you personally. For example, if someone hurts you with harsh angry words, or they lie to you or steal from you, they are sinning against you.

Third, you don't have to follow these steps if you have the ability to overlook the offense and simply forgive the person. This is not the same as ignoring it or pretending it didn't happen. It doesn't mean to repress your feelings. It's the choice to turn the other cheek. Jesus said in Matthew 5:38-41, "If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other as well." There's no thought of revenge or retaliation. Some call this the F.I.D.O. principle: Forget It and Drive On. So you aren't required to do this in every instance someone offends you.

Jesus is the perfect example for us. He was sinned against more than any of us, and He didn't have to follow these steps, He simply forgave the offenses. In 1 Peter 2:23 we read, "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to Him who judges justly." On the cross He simply prayed, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

However, these steps apply when the hurt is so deep that the offense can't be overlooked. Sometimes a relationship is so damaged these steps must be followed. As we examine these steps, will you ask the Holy Spirit if there is someone with whom you are no longer in tune? Is there anyone who comes to your mind who has hurt you, and the issue hasn't been resolved? Here's what you can do to get back in tune with them:

Step 1: Try to win your friend back privately

The goal is not to rebuke them but to be reconciled with them. Jesus said your goal it is to WIN them over. The goal should be a win/win experience for both of you. The reason many relationships are fractured is because people don't follow this first simple step. Instead of going to that person and speaking to them privately, the offended party goes to a third party and complains or gossips about them. When you do that you have disrupted the whole process and you become the offender.

When you go to this brother or sister, approach them with humility and speak the truth in love. If

both of you are tuned in to Jesus, the problem can be resolved at this step, and there can be reconciliation. Let me give you an imaginary scenario of how this should happen.

This is just an illustration, because I love Mike Parks and I think he loves me. But let's say that I'm at a gathering of GABC members and Mike is there. I sometimes tease a little too harshly, so let's imagine that in Mike's presence I say something less than kind about him. I'm joking and everyone laughs, but Mike isn't laughing as loudly as the other people.

Later, Mike comes to me one-on-one and says, "David, I love you and I know you love me. But the other night, what you said really hurt me, and I just wanted you to know this because I don't want there to be anything between us as we serve the Lord together." At that point, I say, "Mike, I'm so sorry. One of my faults is that I tease too much. I will watch my big mouth, and with God's help I'll fix it. Will you forgive me?" Mike says, "Sure, man." And we hug and move on together serving the Lord. But my respect for Mike increases because of his willingness to talk to me personally about it instead of talking about me to others. That's the way this should work. In my experience, about 95% of relationship problems can be healed at this step. However, in some cases, the issue is not resolved, and Jesus tells us what to do next.

Step 2: Enlist other friends to help you

Jesus said if your friend won't hear you then take one or two other friends to help you. The goal isn't to gang up on your friend. You don't take YOUR best friend; you find someone who is a mutual friend. The third person is there as a mediator and prayer partner. This other person can help clarify the issues and keep emotions in check.

Through the years I've served as this mediator many times. Again, the goal is not punishment or retaliation; the goal is to win your friend back. I've had the joy of seeing two believers in conflict pray together and forgive each other after we have talked. In my experience, over 99% of relationship problems can be solved in step one or step two. However, on rare occasions, the relational conflict is still not healed. That's when Jesus said it's time for the next step.

Step 3: Ask the church for help

If the person still won't agree to reconciliation, Jesus said to share the need with the church. This step brings in more people to pray and seek to bring about healing. Hopefully, the issue can be resolved, but if the offender still doesn't agree to reconciliation, then Jesus said to treat the person like a pagan or a tax collector. Jesus didn't say you kick them out of the church or treat them with hostility. The goal is not punishment, but restoration. How did Jesus treat tax collectors and pagans? He loved them, and treated them as people who needed to come into a saving relationship with God.

In my 20 years of serving at GABC, we have only had to take step three a few times. In those rare cases we shared it with the church leadership and that person was asked to give up a leadership position because we believe that all our teachers and leaders should be obedient followers of Jesus Christ. And NO, I will never tell you who those people were, but I will tell you that in most cases the person repented and is back serving the Lord.

All I'm saying is this process *works*. Do you need to apply it? By the way, reconciliation works in both directions: whether you have been offended, or you are the offender. When you realize there is a relational breach, *you* should initiate reconciliation. In Matthew 5:23 Jesus said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift."

Through the years I've known of people who were in conflict and each one was waiting for the other to move first to bring about reconciliation. I once saw a comedy about a typical western gunfight. Two gunslingers faced each other and one said, "You draw." The other said, "No, you draw first." The movie fast-forwards with them standing there continuing the face off for weeks and months as the seasons change. Mothers walk with their children between them as they continue to say, "You draw." "No, you draw first." It's pretty funny. But there's nothing funny about two Christians who are in a relational standoff. One is thinking, "If they draw first, and come to me and seek reconciliation, then I'll draw." The other is thinking, "I'm not crawling to that person. Let them come to me."

So who should move first—the offended or the offender? Listen carefully: The one who is most like Jesus will move first, whether you are the offender or the offended. Jesus initiated reconciliation. He didn't say, "When these sinners come crawling to me, I'll forgive them." No. The Bible says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8) Do you need get back in tune with a brother or sister?

2. STAY IN TUNE WITH HEAVEN'S AUTHORITY

Jesus said, "Whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

This is one of the most misunderstood verses in the Bible. Some people have misunderstood these words to mean that Jesus has given us the authority to do things here that will be reflected in heaven. The name-it-and-claim-it crowd takes this verse to mean that we have some kind of magical power to bind and loose here and what we do is emulated in heaven. But it's actually just the opposite.

In the past, the Roman Catholic Church has used this verse to teach that the Church has the authority to forgive sins. When the priest says, *absolvo te* (your sins are forgiven) then God in heaven is obligated to forgive your sins. This belief became the justification for the Church selling indulgences, a kind of get-out-of-hell card. The Church sold indulgences, because they thought it had the authority to bind and loose. The selling of indulgences was the main reason Martin Luther protested against the Roman Catholic Church and launched the Protestant Reformation.

So what was Jesus talking about? The wonderful Bible scholar Warren Wiersbe sheds some light on this: "This was a very familiar phrase to the Jews, for their rabbis often spoke of 'binding and loosing,' that is, forbidding or permitting. The tense of the verbs are most important. Jesus was

saying, 'Whatever you bind on earth (forbid), shall have already been bound in heaven. Whatever you loose (permit) on earth has already been loosed in heaven.' Jesus didn't say that God would obey what they did on earth, but that they should do on earth whatever God had already willed. The church doesn't get man's will done in heaven; it obeys God's will on earth."

Where is heaven? Would everyone point to heaven right now? Hmm. Interesting, what if I ask that question in China, which way would they be pointing? We make a mistake if we think that heaven is "up there." The Kingdom of heaven can't be understood spatially.

The kingdom of heaven exists at this moment as an invisible spiritual kingdom that is closer than you can imagine. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:6 that God has raised us up and "seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." That's not a future promise; it's true *now*. The problem is we can't perceive heaven with our five senses. We can only perceive heaven with our eyes of faith. Our experience here is only a reflection of heaven, but it's not a good reflection, only a dim one. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul writes that now we see only a poor reflection, like a mirror that is fogged up.

For instance, at this moment, there are invisible images flashing all around us. There's a picture of a newscaster in Washington. There's a picture of some washed-up football players and coaches talking about who is going to win the NFL games today. There's an image of a golfer teeing off. There's an image of a rock band playing. So you'll know I'm not totally crazy, I'm talking about invisible television waves that being broadcast all around us. All we have to do to receive those images would be to have a television set tuned to the right frequency. That's not farfetched at all.

And when you tune your heart and mind into the kingdom of heaven, then you will see things with your eyes of faith and hear things with your ears of faith. And our job is not to bring heaven in line with our wishes, but to bring our wishes in line with heavens.

3. PRAY IN TUNE WITH A PRAYER PARTNER

Jesus said, "If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven." Here's where Jesus used the word symphony. Again, this doesn't give us a magical power to claim anything we want. This is a picture of two believers coming together and praying in harmony. One believer asks another believer to pray a certain way. The second believer may sense this isn't God's will and will tell his or her friend. But if the second one senses it is God's will they pray together in symphony, they agree.

Praying in private is the primary way we should pray. Jesus instructed us to get alone in our prayer closet and pray in secret. But there is great power when believers pray together. It may be a duet of prayer, or a concert of thousands praying together. There is exponential power in sharing prayer with a prayer partner. There's an obscure verse in the Old Testament that says, "How could one man chase a thousand, or two put ten thousand to flight." (Deuteronomy 32:30)

That's a strange ratio don't you think? If one could chase a thousand, you'd expect two to chase

two thousand, but it says TEN thousand. When two Christians get together and pray there is a massive multiplication in their effectiveness.

Everyone should have a prayer partner. I have several. Everyone should have a prayer group they meet with regularly. For the past twenty years I've been praying every Sunday morning with a group of dedicated men.

From the earliest days, the Church felt the need to gather together in prayer. They were praying in the upper room in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit came to fill them. In Acts 4 they were praying because they were being persecuted. In Acts 12 they prayed Peter out of prison.

When someone else is praying, you should be agreeing with them. When I'm praying with someone and they are praying, I'll be saying "Amen" throughout the prayer—I'm agreeing with them.

Like many of you I've been praying for a spiritual awakening in our church and in our nation. How will we know when awakening is happening? It's when we see thousands of people gathering to pray on a regular basis, not because the pastor said to, but because their hearts were moved to pray. Every great spiritual awakening was ignited by prayer and not by preaching. When our Upper Room Prayer Center is full of people praying 24/7 we will know for certain that a spiritual awakening is sweeping East Texas.

4. PLAY IN TUNE WITH JESUS

Jesus said, "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." I'm not using the word "play" as in "play a game." The Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, but the battles are fought and won in prayer. I mean to "play" as to "play an instrument." Jesus is the conductor of the symphony, and I must tune my life to His heart and will.

Why didn't Jesus say, "When ONE of you prays, I'm there in the midst?" It's because you can't really be in the "midst" of one person. The Spirit of Jesus indwells us, but there is a special awareness of the presence and power of Jesus when two or three people gather in His name. In other words, the full expression of the power of Jesus is never full experienced in an individual believer, but in the Church as a whole. It may be two or three gathered, or two or three hundred, or two or three thousand; but when there is an awareness that Jesus is there, great things happen.

That's why every believer needs to be a part of a local church. Jesus used the word GATHER. You can't gather by yourself! You can believe in Jesus as an individual, but you cannot experience all the blessings that God has for you unless you gather with other believers.

There is an attitude people often have that says, "I love Jesus, I just don't like the Church." That's like saying, "I love to swim, but I don't like water." It's like saying, "I love to eat, but I don't like food." The Church IS the Body of Christ.

I love that great prayer of Paul recorded in Ephesians 3. He prayed that we may have "power,

together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:18) We will never know it alone; we can only grasp it as we gather with the saints.

The power of the Church doesn't lie in the number of members, its money, its buildings, or even its various ministries. The power of the church lies in this promise from Jesus, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, THERE I AM with them.” Jesus is here right now. Do you sense His presence? If you don't the problem isn't with Jesus. He isn't a liar. He IS here because we are gathered in His name. Your life will not be changed by a song or by a message, but by the recognition of the presence of Jesus and a personal surrender to the power of Jesus Christ. Will you tune your heart to Him?

CONCLUSION

Jesus is our standard for unity and agreement. I once had a piano tuner tell me something I never knew. He said you could line up 100 pianos in a big room to tune them together. He said it would be a mistake to tune each piano to the one next to it. In other words, if you tuned piano #2 to piano #1 and then tuned piano #3 to piano #2 ... all the way to piano #100, then piano #100 and piano #1 would be terribly out of tune. That's why piano tuners don't tune pianos to each other; they use something called a tuning fork. If a tuner tunes each of the 100 pianos to the tuning fork, then all 100 pianos will be in perfect tune with each other.

What a parable! Jesus is our tuning fork. We shouldn't try to tune our lives to each other, that will only lead to disharmony. Instead we should each tune our hearts to Jesus Christ. When that happens our lives will be in perfect pitch with each other. As the wonderful old hymn says, “tune my heart to sing your praise.”

Lloyd C. Douglas wrote the wonderful book, *The Robe*. When he was a university student he lived in a boarding house. He befriended a retired music teacher who lived on the first floor and was confined to a wheel chair. Douglas said every morning as he would leave he'd stick his head into the music teacher's room and ask, “What's the good news today?” Every morning the music teacher would pick up a tuning fork and tap it on the side of his wheelchair and say, “that's an A note. It was an A yesterday, and it will be an A tomorrow; it will be an A a thousand years from now. The tenor upstairs is flat, the piano across the hall is out of tune, but THAT is an A!” He's right. There are so many things that are temporary and false in this life. But the Bible says Jesus Christ is “the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Have you ever turned from your sins and put your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord? That's the only way you can tune your life into His life. And when each of our lives is in tune with Jesus, then we can be a part of God's beautiful symphony.

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes