



Acts 15:36-41



Overview

This is the second of our three-week series for Missions Month. The first week, our focus was on background differences. This past Sunday, Tim talked about conflict among believers in Acts. Today, we'll look at what causes disunity, what we can personally do to facilitate unity in our relationships, and what unity should look like between believers.



Getting to Know You

When I was young, I watched my dad help repair our church through two big church splits and several other small rifts in between (i.e. putting new carpet in the sanctuary). Many of us have such stories, and addressing this can touch a sore spot. Good thing God is our peace and our help! Where have you experienced a Christian community (at church, Bible study, on tv, at home or work) be out of sync with Jesus' mandate of love between believers (like in John 13:34-35)? Why do you think Christians sometimes clash?



Digging Deeper

Looking at Disunity

- Through Jesus, we are made holy and righteous before God (Romans 3:21-22). Through the Holy Spirit, we are given specific gifts to be used in the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-12). But, we can all agree that we are human and we mess up. Each of us has a unique backstory – a different family culture, a different worldview – and we each have a unique personality to go with that. So naturally, we can clash.
- What are some things (ways of acting, character flaws, hurts) that might stand in the way of unity between believers? Discuss. (For help, look at Galatians 6:3, Matthew 7:1-2, 1 Corinthians 4:6, Mark 7:6, 1 Timothy)
- Our flaws can include pride, obstinance, hypocrisy, self-righteousness, sin, self-pity, misplaced anger or hurt, among others. Is there any part of who you are or how you relate to others that you need to evaluate with the help of the Spirit? How can you practically work on this?
- Is there any hurt, resentment, or unforgiveness you hold against another believer or even against an entire group of believers? How can you forgive and move past these hurts? (II Corinthians 2:10-11)

Looking at Unity

- The book of Acts takes us on a journey of how the early church related to one another. Take turns reading these verses up to the argument in Acts 15. Point out the things we should emulate from each passage.
 - Acts 1:13-14a
 - Acts 2:42, 44-47a
 - Acts 4:32-35
 - Acts 9:23-25
 - Acts 12:5
 - Acts 13:1-3
 - Acts 15:36
- Read Acts 15:37-41, then 1 Timothy 4:11. In the sermon on Sunday, Tim referred to the Paul-John Mark story as a “redemption story”. We don’t know what happened between Paul and Barnabas, but John Mark was forgiven and loved. How does this reflect the story of redemption in the Bible?
- How can we use the pictures of unity in Acts to seek a redemption story in the conflicts and struggles we have with unbelievers?

**Taking it home**

In everything we do, we want to be like Jesus. 1 Peter 2:23 says: “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.”

This week, trust God – the Just Judge – to help you act like Jesus in any and every conflict.

**Prayer**

Ask God for unity among his people. Ask Him to allow the Holy Spirit to guide you as you work out any resentments you may have against one of his children. Ask Him to heal us from past hurts that may have originated in church. And pray for continued unity in His church throughout the world – among missionaries, church plants, and our own churches here in New Zealand.