

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY FOUR

Hope Beyond Division:
Reasons for Pulling Together*1 Peter 1:22–2:3*

Unity is an almost forgotten virtue.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HAVE you ever witnessed anything like this? A fan at a sporting event punches someone cheering for the opposition, causing the stands to erupt into an all-out brawl. A politician goes so far as to break the law to humiliate, or even eliminate, a local rival. A discussion about religion quickly degrades as two family members shout biting words and personal digs. Moments like these reveal a harsh reality . . .

Humankind is more divided than ever.

Each person is unique. There's nothing wrong with that! Yet we live in a time when differing preferences and disparate ideologies produce hostility that threatens to rip apart friendships, families, and entire nations. Communities that once held together like tightly bound ropes have been unraveling. Enmity is fraying the threads—one at a time.

Sadly, even the church is susceptible to this kind of division. Some Christian communities are characterized more by scalding hatred, unfair criticism, and deceptive backstabbing than they are by self-sacrificial love and devotion to Jesus Christ.

How can the church resist the constant temptation to divide and instead come together in Christ? The apostle Peter answered this very question in his first letter and cast a vision of a church that pulls together rather than one that drifts apart.



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1 Peter 1:22–2:3



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Offer this prayer as you prepare to dig into Scripture:

Father, the desires to be right rather than loving, to win rather than encourage, to silence rather than serve tempt me like everyone else. That way is not Your way. Give me the strength to live in peace with all people. Examine my heart through Your Word today, and show me the role I can play to cultivate unity with my brothers and sisters in Christ. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Peter wrote to believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Persecution was on the rise, so the apostle acknowledged that his fellow followers of Jesus would have to “endure many trials” during this season (1 Peter 1:6).

When internal and external pressures push against a Christian community, the threat of division looms closely. Peter recognized this fact, so in 1:22–2:3, he offered his readers several reasons why they should join hands in unity rather than allow their circumstances to force them to go their separate ways.



Observation: United by Love

Most Christians want to apply the teachings of Scripture to their lives. Yet, if we get too eager, we run the risk of not spending enough time understanding the full meaning of a passage. If application is the destination, then observation is the first step.¹ Read 1 Peter 1:22–2:3 closely. This passage is rich with applicable points. For now, however, simply focus on what it says.



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1 Peter 1:22–2:3

According to *1 Peter 1:22*, what happened when Peter’s readers “obeyed the truth”? How did Peter want this new reality to affect their relationships?

In *1:23*, Peter yet again reminded his readers that they have been “born again” (see *1:3*). From what kind of “seed” were they born? According to *1:23–25*, how could his readers have assurance of this reality?

According to *2:1*, what five kinds of sin did Peter tell his readers to “get rid of”?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



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What image did Peter use to describe his readers in 1 Peter 2:2–3? What does this imagery represent?

How do you develop unity and community so that you don't live your lives so damnably lonely? First, there is obedience to the truth. Second, there is purity of soul. Third, there is a lack of hypocrisy. That's what makes it possible to pull together. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Pure Lives, Pure Love, Pure Unity

Peter said, “You have *purified* your souls. . . So love one another earnestly from a *pure* heart” (1 Peter 1:22 NET, emphasis added). Christ’s purification of believers’ souls strengthens them to love one another more powerfully, which tightly binds them together in unity.

Peter referred to the love he desired his readers to embrace as *philadelphian anypokriton*—“unhypocritical brotherly love.” Those living in the first-century world considered their siblings among their closest companions, and many would have even felt closer to their siblings than their own spouse. How does this context help you understand the nature of Christian unity?



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Look over your list of the five vices in *1 Peter 2:1*. How do these kinds of behaviors damage Christian unity? For additional insights into the meaning of these vices, look up the meaning of some of these terms in Bill Mounce's Greek dictionary at billmounce.com: *kakia*, *dolos*, *hypokrisis*, *phthonos*, and *katalalia*. Or look on page 176 of Pastor Chuck Swindoll's commentary, *Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter*.

What positive behaviors and attitudes counteract these five negative vices? How do these virtues cultivate unity in a Christian community?

For Peter, love and unity cannot exist without one another. Yet Peter didn't come up with this revelation on his own. Rather, he learned it from his Teacher . . . *the One who embodied love in everything He did*.



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Correlation: A Demonstration, a Command, and a Prayer

If Jesus wanted His followers to be characterized by any trait, it was love. On His last evening with His disciples, He taught the importance of this virtue through a demonstration, a command, and a prayer.

First, Jesus *demonstrated* self-sacrificial love. According to [John 13:4–5](#), what did Jesus do for His disciples? And according to [13:14–15](#), what example did Jesus set through this action?

Then, Jesus *commanded* His disciples to love one another. According to [13:34–35](#), *how* were the disciples to love one another? What would be the result of them showing this kind of love?



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Finally, Jesus *prayed* for His disciples. According to *John 17:20–23*, what was Jesus' desire for His disciples? How do your answers to the previous two questions help you understand how Jesus envisioned His desire being fulfilled?

I would love to see the day when Christians are so closely drawn together that nothing divisive can penetrate the circle. They stick together because the group is such a tightly knit team! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: True Unity

In this world characterized by division and hostility, Pastor Chuck offers four reasons why we can pull together in unity:

1. We are children of the same Father: *our heavenly Father*.
2. We take our instruction from the same source: *the Word of God*.
3. We have our struggles in the same realm: *the flesh and sin*.
4. We focus our attention on the same objective: *spiritual maturity*.



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What kinds of issues, practices, or beliefs most threaten the unity of your local Christian community? Which of these four reasons above will cause your brothers and sisters in Christ to pull together?

Have you experienced division with a certain Christian brother or sister lately? What would it look like for you to strive for unity by showing this fellow follower of Jesus Christ unhypocritical brotherly love?

Many would say that true unity is impossible. Peter would argue that true unity is impossible . . . *without Christ*. Nothing ties a community of Christians together like the love of the Savior. Accept His love. Bind it to your relationships. And link arms with your brothers and sisters in Christ.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for the love You've shown me throughout my life. You chose to join Yourself to me in Christ even though I did nothing to deserve it. Help me come together with my fellow believers in Jesus Christ—even those I find hardest to love. Make me a person of unity, not a person of division. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

