Submission, Fellowship, Unity

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, October 12, 2025
PASSAGES	1 Peter 5; Hebrews 13; 1 Thessalonians 5; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; John 17; 2 Thessalonians 3
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:12:27 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

Ask a room to name the Christian disciplines and you will get scripture reading, prayer, confession, giving — all of it run through an individual filter. Matt made the case that submission, imitation and fellowship belong on that list too, and that the union underneath them is not something we manufacture by getting along. It is created by drinking of one Spirit, or it is not real.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- You cannot reach peak spiritual health alone. Union with Jesus makes discipleship a family endeavor by default.
- Submission in the household of God is always given voluntarily and never taken — which is what makes it a discipline rather than a demand.
- Scripture expects us to imitate mature saints, not only Christ. Paul says follow me; Hebrews says consider the outcome of your leaders' lives and imitate their faith.
- The cloud of witnesses is not a group of ghosts watching you look for your keys. It is a long line of people prepared to testify that God is faithful — delivered by the sword or sawn in half, either way the same testimony.
- "Do not neglect to meet together" is not really a verse about going to church. Going to a building and going home again is not the thing being described.
- Unity is Christocentric. It can be maintained by bonds of peace, but it cannot be created by hugging, and where two people are drinking from different cups no amount of togetherness repairs it.

- None of this is a demand that introverts live surrounded. Jesus had alone time. The point is that we are not floating heads.

▶ 1:12:27

Matt opened where most lists of the disciplines open — scripture reading, prayer, repentance, confession, giving — and then flagged the assumption buried in them. "I wouldn't want anyone to think that we can achieve peak Christian health if we just on our own read the Bible and pray and repent." The mystery of our union with Jesus, he said, makes discipleship a family endeavor by default.

Why the lights stay up

▶ 1:13:20

He reached for a small, concrete example: Hope Chapel does not dim the lights for worship. The usual explanation is that worship is not a concert, which is true, but Matt wanted the deeper reason. "It's not that I want you to feel like *I* am worshiping the Lord. *We* are worshiping the Lord." No band is so loud that you cannot hear your neighbor, and that is on purpose. The point is not to tune out the body in order to focus on the Lord; it is to focus on him together as a body. A small thing about stage lighting turns out to reflect a corporate reality that is simply a fact about us.

1. Submission — and the elders it names

▶ 1:16:08

> "Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock… Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."
>
> 1 PETER 5:2–5 ↗

A flock, Matt pointed out, is not a soup of individuals, and shepherding is interpersonal by definition. Elders exercise oversight over a flock they are actually connected to, not a classroom of strangers. And humility here is applied relationally — voluntary subjection to elders cannot be practiced in the abstract. He put a fence around it: all submission in the household of God is given voluntarily, never taken.

2. Imitation — following mature saints as they follow Christ

▶ 1:18:16

Being examples to the flock is a biblical concept, not a personality trait. Jesus is not our only permanent example for me, myself and I — we follow mature saints as they follow Christ. Paul says it plainly (1 Corinthians 11:1), and Hebrews says it again:
"Remember your leaders… consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the sam
Because he does not change, Paul's obedience is still a valid example a long time later, and so is Thomas Aquinas's. "Paul belongs to you. Thomas Aquinas belongs to you," Matt said. Roman, Orthodox, Protestant — a family.

▶ 1:19:30

Which reframes the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12:1. Not a weather phenomenon, and not a gallery of spectators keeping tabs on your living room. "I don't think they're doomed or condemned to a life of watching me look for my keys." They are witnesses in the courtroom sense: a long line of people willing to testify to God's faithfulness — delivered from the sword or sawn in half, fed or starved, fruitful or persecuted, and all of them with the same testimony.

▶ 1:20:38

> "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you."
>
> HEBREWS 13:17 ↗

Note the direction of the benefit. It is to *our* advantage — and it can only be done communally.

▶ 1:21:06

He stopped to reassure the introverts, who by this point were doing the math on how much community was being prescribed. "You need your alone time. Jesus had alone time. I'm just saying that we are not in a void, just a floating head listening to the latest Christian doctrine." We belong to each other whether we have tons of alone time to contemplate it or not.

▶ 1:22:18

> "And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."
>
> 1 THESSALONIANS 5:12–15 ↗

The idle may not enjoy being prodded, but it is not good for them to stay that way, and God's intent for the body is health. Matt's question was practical: how do you admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted or help the weak except by being connected? Small groups, mentoring relationships, and the unscheduled minutes before and after a service. His warning: do not be isolated even while surrounded by people.

▶ 1:23:31

Then 1 Corinthians 16:15–18, where Paul tells the church to be subject to the household of Stephanas. Not because of their age — because they had devoted themselves to the service of the saints. Voluntary subjection is owed to people who are themselves devoted to serving the family of God. And in 1 Corinthians 4:15–17 Paul goes further: you have countless guides but few fathers, so be imitators of me. Matt's chain of consequences was hard to argue with: "It's hard to imitate people we don't know. It's hard to know someone we don't interact with. It's hard to interact with people we avoid."

3. Fellowship — the thing a letter could not replace

▶ 1:29:50

Before turning to fellowship he told one story. On a 2005 mission trip called Beach Reach, church buses ran free rides for drunk students on South Padre Island through the night while older saints made pancakes in the morning. Partway through, Matt found out — accidentally, and he does not think he was meant to know — that the women on the trip were fasting for the men, asking the Lord to protect their eyes. Nobody had asked them to. "There are free pancakes, and they were fasting for us." Twenty years later it still brings tears to his eyes.

> "For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."
>
> ROMANS 1:11–12 ↗

Paul could pray from a distance, and did. He could send a letter, and did. He still longed to come, because something about in-person fellowship could not be posted.

▶ 1:31:31

The early church's version of it is in Acts 2:42–46 — devoted to the apostles' teaching and *the fellowship*, second on the list, then the breaking of bread and the prayers; possessions sold and distributed as any had need; homes and glad hearts. They clearly understood discipleship as something done as a family.

▶ 1:33:05

He had a go at the footprints-in-the-sand story, mangled it cheerfully, and then salvaged the better point from the wreckage: there is nothing wrong with the story, but there should also be "a great host of footprints." Not one set walking a private beach — or else a single set, with Christ carrying all of us at once.

> "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."
>
> HEBREWS 10:23–25 ↗

▶ 1:34:18

This is the verse people cite to defend going to church, and Matt thinks the phrase misses the idea. "Going to church kind of sounds like independent, unconnected floating heads got in their car and went to a special building, and then got out and into the special building, and then got back into their cars and went home." We are not running a Christian podcast with introductory music. There is a mystical reality in gathering as a congregation where the Lord walks among us — which is why a live stream is not church in the same way that merely entering a building is not church either.

▶ 1:35:42

He read 1 John 1:6–7 and admitted the grammar is ambiguous — fellowship with him, or with one another, or both. Either way it lands in the same place: if you are hidden in Christ you are part of his body, and if you are part of his body you are hidden in Christ. Enter that verse with an individual mindset and you still come out inside a corporate one.

4. Unity you can maintain but cannot create

▶ 1:36:12

> "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — Jews or Greeks, slaves or free — and all were made to drink of one Spirit."
>
> 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12–13 ↗

That body includes this room, the church across the city and around the world today, those who went before us, and those who have not joined yet but will. Ephesians 4:2–6 tells us to be eager to *maintain* the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace — one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Maintain, Matt stressed, not manufacture. "You and I could never create these bonds. The only way to form this bond of connection is by drinking the same spirit… not by shaking hands."

▶ 1:38:00

> "…that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me… that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me."
>
> JOHN 17:20–23 ↗

Yes, Jesus loves you individually and knows the hairs on your head. And this is also what he asked for. Something about our union as a body is what makes the world able to believe the Father sent the Son — and it is established supernaturally, not by being in the same room.

▶ 1:39:14

Then the ending nobody expects from a sermon on unity: 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15, where Paul commands the church in the Lord's name to keep away from any brother walking in idleness — not busy at work but busybodies — and to take note of anyone who will not obey the letter, so that he may be ashamed. Not as an enemy. Warned as a brother. Matt read it as proof of his own thesis from the other direction: if unity were togetherness, division would always be its opposite. Since unity is created in Christ, it sometimes requires admonishment, warning and even separation.

▶ 1:41:03

"If one of us is drinking from the cup of Christ and another is drinking from the cup of this world, no amount of hugging and kumbaya can fix that." We are disciples of Jesus, not a club of people who like each other a whole awful lot — otherwise, as Steve likes to joke, we could rename the place Nice Folks Chapel.

▶ 1:42:31

So the invitation at the end was the ordinary one, and Matt was clear that it is the only door into any of the rest: believe that Jesus died for your sins, give yourself to him, be buried with him and anticipate a resurrection with him. What that produces is an unkillable mystery of union with Christ that turns out to be the bond of family between us. Which is why the disciplines of the faith include fellowship, submission to one another and to our elders, and a sense of belonging. By definition, these could not possibly be a solo sport.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE

- 1 Peter 5:2–5
- 1 Corinthians 11:1
- Hebrews 13:7
- Hebrews 12:1
- Hebrews 13:17
- 1 Thessalonians 5:12–15
- 1 Corinthians 16:15–18
- 1 Corinthians 4:15–17
- Romans 1:11–12
- Acts 2:42–46
- Hebrews 10:23–25
- 1 John 1:6–7
- 1 Corinthians 12:12–13
- Ephesians 4:2–6
- John 17:20–23
- 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. When you picture spiritual health, whose face is in the picture besides your own? What does that tell you about the filter you have been running?
2. Submission in the household of God is given voluntarily and never taken. Where have you been asked to give it, and what has made you hesitate?
3. Matt said it is hard to imitate people we do not know, and hard to know people we avoid. Who is a mature saint you could actually watch up close this fall?
4. Which of the four — admonishing the idle, encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak, being patient with all — is the one you are least likely to do, and who in the body needs it from you?
5. If unity is something we maintain rather than create, what is one bond of peace you need to repair or protect this week?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2vXkES9q3A&t=4347s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.