

# Relationships and our Unity in Christ

## Part B

We are looking at what unity means. Christ's work of reconciliation on the cross not only brought peace between us and God; it also brings the unity of the Spirit between all who believe on Christ, despite our great diversity, including differences in background.

**Key verses**

**John 17: 20-23**  
**Galatians 3: 26-29:**

*'You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptised into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.'*

**Themes**

- A. Jew and Gentile**
- B. Slave and Free**
- C. Male and Female**

**B. Slave and Free.....Social Differences**

	Many great differences because of our circumstances		No difference in Christ
	Slave	Free	
<b>Social class, financial state, influence.</b>	Poor	Rich	Sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Gal.3:26, 1Tim.6:17-19.
<b>Inheritance, future prospects</b>	No inheritance	Inheritance	Abraham's seed. All heirs according to the promise. Matt.5:5, Gal.3:29, Gal.4:4-5 Jam.2:5, Heb.1:14.
<b>Education</b>	Minimal	Extensive	Taught by the Spirit. Jer.31:34, Mat.23:10, Joh.16:12,13, 1Cor.2:12
<b>Clothing, outward appearance</b>	Not imposing	Imposing	Clothed with Christ. Gal.3:27, Jam. 2:1-4, 1Cor. 5:5b.
<b>Job opportunities</b>	Servant Menial tasks	Master Respect person	Brothers, fellow labourers, one in Christ Jesus. Gal. 3:28. Mat. 23:8-11 Eph.6:5 & 9.
<b>Freedom in decision-making</b>	Bound, ordered to do the will of master	Free, able to do as he or she wills	Freed by Christ from the slavery of sin. John 8: 30-36.
<b>Social worth</b>	Despised	Esteemed	In opposition to the world's values, Christ commands those who are in Him to <u>esteem each other highly</u> . Phil. 2:3, Rom. 12:10, 1Cor. 1:28, John 13:14-15

## Principles for our Relationships

*How to love your fellow believers in Christ. These **actions** of love are drawn from the lesson on page 1.*

The following principles can be applied to our relations with all people. They will be applied to the greatest effect in loving our brothers and sister in the family of faith.

### 1. See others as God sees them

instead of letting your attitudes be formed by the world, according to the other person's education, social class, financial state, influence and outward appearance.  
James 1:9-11, Proverbs 11:12.

### 2. Be attentive to the needs of your neighbour

instead of seeking to impress, and only showing watchfulness for the needs of those with greater influence.  
James 2:1-9, Proverbs 12:18.

### 3. Break through social barriers with Christ's love

instead of showing disrespect for those over you or looking down on those of lesser social standing  
1 Tim. 6:1-2, Philemon 15-16, Rom. 12.16.

### 4. Rejoice in the truth about your own social standing

instead of concluding, if poor and insignificant, that you have no worth, or thinking, if living comfortably and as respected, that you have received this through merit and as a permanent state.  
James 1:9-11 (and v.4), 1Cor. 1:10 to 2:5, Ecclesiastes 6:1-2, Prov. 15:16 & 17.

### 5. Appreciate that God has invested in others for your benefit

Eagerly watch for and accept God's chosen method of correcting society's imbalances instead of blindly accepting religious ideas, rules and regulations. Regulations to raise certain people and lower others help maintain systems of domination by the rich, powerful and educated. They stem from a heart attitude of pride and rebellion and not from submission to God's Word. Those who truly serve God will also be willing to serve you and will not want to enslave you. If you are a leader, remember that you need correction and balance from your brothers and sisters as much as, or even more than, they need this from you.

Acts 4:13, Eph. 4:7-8 ('grace to each one of us') & 11-13, 1Cor. 7:20-24, 12:22-25, Matt. 20:25-28.

### 6. Encourage others to invest now for their future

Those in slavery know nothing of investment or of determining their future through bold decision-making. Now that you yourself believe that God's Word is for all the heirs of the promises of Abraham, do the following: Make every effort to help your brethren lay hold of their inheritance in faith by making known to them what is theirs in Christ

instead of allowing yourself to be content with the lack of victorious living found within the church. Ignorance of God's will is one of the reasons for this great lack.

Prov.29:18, Hos.4:6, Eph.4:13, Gal.3:27-29, Joh.8:36

## Take action!

Although the expression “free” and “slave” does not match entirely with “rich” and “poor”, there are similarities. With riches comes a freedom of choice that the poor man does not possess in regards to his activities and his possessions in this world. There are many believers in the well-to-do countries with resources at their disposal (e.g. sanitation, good transport facilities, free schooling) that give great freedom to make far-reaching choices. Even the poorer among them enjoy such privileges. In poor countries however, many feel enslaved and powerless due to harsh circumstances.

**Q. How can those who are ‘free’ stand with those enslaved by their circumstances (especially with their poor brethren)?**

**A. Help them glory in the exaltation that they have received in Christ. We do this when our attitudes and actions towards these brothers and sisters match the dignity that Christ has given them.**

The ‘free’ in the time of Paul were those whose circumstances were good enough for them to be able to determine their own futures. The slaves around them were not only poorer, but were humbled in their complete dependency upon their masters. They were in bondage to the commands and even the whims of their masters. The attitude of the slave towards his masters would have been of submission on the outside, but of brokenness and even bitterness and anger on the inside.

The freeman or woman would have taken this attitude of subservience that his or her slave showed him as being normal. The attitude received by many “free” people, even Christians, since early childhood, would have been to look down upon all slaves. The feelings, the dignity and the needs of the slave would not have been important to them. We can see by the examples of the care for slaves by noble-hearted men, that not every master thought this way, e.g. Luke 7:2. The Scriptures teach that we must show such consideration (Deut 5:12-15, 15:12-15).

The way Israel was told to look after slaves and the less fortunate, helps us see how God wants the lowly, poor brethren in the church to be treated. Our attitudes towards such brothers help them think correctly about themselves: ***‘Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation,...’*** James. 1:9

This instruction involved the whole church, not just the lowly brother, for we are not to accept the wrong attitudes of the “free” (privileged) people towards their lowly brothers. This is still thought to be normal in many churches (James 2:1-9). We have the privilege of ensuring that the lowly brother understands and feels the dignity (exultation) he has received in Christ. He must not only hear about it, but should be able to receive it through the treatment he receives daily from his fellow believers.

- Q. How can those who are enslaved by their poverty stand with those who are 'free' (especially with their rich brethren)?**
- A. Help them glory in the humiliation that they have received from Christ! (Compare this with the answer to the last question.)**  
**We do this, when our attitudes and actions towards these brothers and sisters do not falsely exalt them because of their worldly status (money, power, success).**

However, we must not go the wrong way and despise such people instead, or desire their downfall! We must respect, love and pray for them, realising it is often difficult for our richer brothers to remember that their glory will pass away and will no longer be seen.

**'... but [let] the rich [glory] in his humiliation, because as a flower of the field he will pass away.'** James 1:10, NKJV (words in brackets from verse 9).

A rich man came to Jesus asking what he must do to inherit eternal life. The disciples were overawed by his outward appearance. The self-respect and dignity his riches gave him, were not even diminished by the outward act of kneeling in the dust before the Lord (Mark 10:17).

The rich man correctly used the word "inherit" when it came to eternal life – but it also reminds us that his advantages in this world were probably passed on to him. Yet Jesus was not at all impressed by his money and power, much to the surprise of the disciples. Jesus said to him: "One thing you lack..." (v.21). The Greek word for "lack" means "come behind" or "be deficient". A directly related word gives the meaning "poverty". This rich man was poor in one area of his life, the most important one!

He was to give up those riches that held his heart back from following the Master. The very thing he put his trust (Mammon) was the very thing that held him back from following Christ. In Christ's eyes, the situation was the exact opposite to what this man and everyone else thought. (cf. Rev. 3:17). This rich man had nothing stored up for the eternal life he hoped to enjoy. The fact that he had, up till that day, no treasure stored in heaven is proved by Jesus words in the future tense: "and you will have treasure in heaven" (Mk. 10:21). He needed to humble himself in order to take the emphasis of his life and his lifestyle away from the earthly and put it on the heavenly.

If we are not in that unfortunate situation that this man was in, we are in a position to help such people. We do not help them by wanting the money of such people! This is greed. We help by being different to the people of the world around us, who are impressed with these riches. The world covets the possessions and is envious of the lifestyle of such people. Church leaders can fall into this trap and they must hold out against it. Paul boldly instructed Timothy in how to be firm and take the initiative (see 1 Tim. 6:17-19). We must see things as they are in the light of eternity.