

“That they may be perfected in unity.””

We will pick up today where we left off two weeks ago, in chapter 17 of the gospel of John. We begin with a brief review.

/In the third section of His prayer, Jesus prays for all who will believe in Him through the witness of His disciples: **the church**, John 17:20-26\

This is where Jesus prays for us. He’s praying for the church, His body.

/ He asks for **unity**: that they may all be one.\

*John 17:20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.*

/He prays for His church to be one in the same way that He and His Father are one!\

For what purpose? That the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus.  
/It's an evangelistic purpose.\

How do we fulfill this purpose?/We fulfill our mission being perfected in unity. This is our **corporate witness** to this lost and dying world. We are one body in Christ.\

*John 17:22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

/Glory is the demonstration of who God is. We reveal to the world what God is like by preserving the unity that He has established for us.\

The world will see our unity and know that God sent Jesus. They will observe our love for one another, and can learn about the love of God for them.

/This morning, we turn to the New Testament epistles. This is the only part of the Bible that has been written directly to the church.\

In the epistles, the Lord reveals mysteries to the church. He instructs us, and expresses His will for us. And He exhorts us and commands us. All in the epistles.

/So today, we will examine what the epistles have to say to us about the subject of the unity of the church.\

The epistles essentially pick up where Jesus left off in His prayer of John 17.

/The unity of the church was created for us by the Lord.\

We don't build it. That's impossible: Only the Lord has the blueprint!

So here's the main idea for this morning:

/We are not called to create the unity of the Body of Christ, the church. But we ARE called to PRESERVE the unity of the body.\

Think about our freedom in this country. We did not create or establish our freedom. Our task in this and every generation is to preserve that freedom.

/There is a negative aspect as well as a positive aspect to this. \

Isn't it true about freedom? Aren't there things we can do to nurture and protect our freedom? Aren't there also things that endanger our freedom?

The same principle holds true for the unity of the body.

/We are called to take actions to nurture the unity, guard the unity.

We are also warned not to do anything that could disrupt or undermine that unity. \

/Our course of study will be, first, to examine what the epistles have to say about what the Lord has done to establish our unity.\

/Then, we will let the Lord instruct us how to preserve that unity. The epistles address both aspects of this: the positive and the negative.\

We begin today in the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 1.

*Eph 4:1-3*

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

/Notice in verse 3 that we are instructed to be diligent to preserve the unity.\

You can only preserve something that has already been established.

/Who established it? Verse 3 tells us: the Spirit. It's His unity.\

Created by the Spirit, to be preserved by the members of the body.

Let's take a look at the nature of this unity that God the Holy Spirit created for us.

/Recall that the unity of the body has been patterned after the unity of the God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, John 17:22.\

In verses 4-6, Paul identifies the essential elements of this unity. There are seven pillars. I note this only in passing this morning. It warrants a study of its own.

*Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

These are the essentials of our unity. They will never change. They cannot be compromised. These pillars are headed up by the three members of Trinity. Would that more Christians hold fast to these as the basis for unity, rather than illegitimate bases - such as traditions, church government, or politics.

/That unity is forged by baptism – the baptism by the Spirit. Each and every believer of Christ is baptized – placed into and permanently identified with – into Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.\ Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

*1 Cor 12:12-13*

*12 For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

We were all baptized by the Spirit into one body. And that body is in Christ.

*Rom 12:5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

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/We have all been baptized into the one body of Christ.\

/The nature of our union with Christ is that of mutual indwelling, John 17:21-23.\

We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

/We are in Christ:\

*Gal 3:27-28*

*27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

*28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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/And Christ is in us:\

*Col 1:25-27*

*25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

/And, as we saw in John 17:21-23, the purpose of this unity is to reveal the glory of Christ and the love of God to the world.\

This is exactly what we find in Paul's admonition to the church in Rome:



*Rom 15:5-9*

*5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,*

*"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,  
AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."*

That leads to the next question, which is this:

/How do we preserve the unity of the body of Christ? Negatively, what things disrupt or undermine the unity of the brethren?\

Today I will sketch this out in broad terms. The epistles go into great detail.

/We begin with the negative. The deeds of the flesh create discord in the body.\

In Paul's day, the church at Corinth was nearly destroyed by this.

*1 Cor 1:10-12*

*10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

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And again:

*1 Cor 3:2-4*

*2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,*

*3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?*

Now for the positive.

/First, this unity is preserved by being of one mind , holding to the “one faith” – the word of God, the mind of Christ.\

Phil 1:27

*27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;*

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/Second, the exercise of spiritual gifts strengthens the unity of the body.\

1 Cor 12:4-7

*4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

All the three members of Trinity contribute to the fruitful exercise of our gifts.

/Third, the lifeblood, the bond of our unity is the love of God, John 17:23.\

*Col 3:12-14*

*12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

/Fourth, the Lord's Supper is designed to express the unity of the body.\

Let's get ready now to celebrate the Lord's Supper.