

## The unity of the Spirit

Today we continue our study of the subject of unity in the epistles. We begin in the gospel of John chapter 17. This passage is the springboard for our study of unity.

*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. 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.*

/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.\

But it's not any unity that the world understands. We know this because -

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

This unity is designed to fulfill a purpose. God never acts haphazardly. He always has a purpose in mind. The purpose of the unity of the church is this: That the world may believe that the Father sent Jesus.

/It's an evangelistic purpose.\

This morning, we turn once again 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 create it or establish it. That's impossible:

Only the Lord has the blueprint! Our unity is supernatural!

When we examine the epistles, here's what we find:

/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.\

Here is where our decisions and actions matter.

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.

/This morning, we are going to examine what the epistles have to say about what the Lord has done to establish our unity.\

Later on, we will learn how to preserve that unity. The epistles address both the positive and the negative commands that the Lord has given the church.

So we pick things up 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 created and established.

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

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

/In verses 4-6, Paul identifies the seven essential elements of this unity. \

*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 are established by the Spirit. Let's see how these seven elements work.

A brief scan of these seven elements reveals that this unity is supernatural in character.

/In fact, three of the seven elements are the three persons of the Godhead!!\

Read verses 4-6 again. One Spirit. One Lord. One Father.

/Then there are two elements that are linked with the Spirit. They are the one body, and the one hope of our calling.\

/Finally, two elements are linked with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.\

Now at this point you might find it odd that no other elements are linked with the Father. But there is a good reason for this.

/The Father is over all. He is sovereign over all things. \

He sent Jesus. Jesus submitted to the will of the Father.

/In this way, the Father is over the Lord Jesus Christ.\

And one day, after the Father has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet, the Son will be subjected to the Father – the One who subjected all things to Him.

*1 Cor 15:22-28*

*22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death. 27 For HE HAS PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.*

*But when He says, "All things are put in subjection," it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. 28 When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.*

/The Father is also over the Holy Spirit\ . The Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ on a mission to redeem lost sinners. And then the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Spirit with the mission to establish the body of Christ.

/The Father is also through all. He operates through the Spirit who carries out His will on earth.\

/The Father is also in all. He is in Christ, and Christ is in us. \

*Eph 1:22-23*

*22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Let's continue with the two elements of our unity that are associated with the Spirit.

### **One body:**

/The one body is the body of Christ. \

*Rom 12:4-5*

*4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

/We saw in Ephesians 1:23 that the church is His body.\

/That unity of the one body is forged by baptism – the baptism by the Spirit. Each and every believer in 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 have all been baptized into the one body of Christ – the church.\

I hope you are starting to see the tremendous interlinking between these different elements of our unity. For example, there is one body. It is the body of Christ. That body is formed by the baptism of the Spirit. We'll see more of this as we go along.

### **One hope of our calling:**

/The one hope of our calling is the resurrection of the body to life eternal when Christ appears for us. This is the hope of our inheritance laid up in heaven for us. \

As we close, let me show this to you in the epistles:

We begin in chapter 1 of Ephesians.

*Eph 1:18*

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

Of course it's no accident that we find Paul introducing these subjects - the body of Christ and the hope of our calling, in the first chapter of the book of Ephesians.

*Rom 8:23-25*

*23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

/Paul speaks of our hope, and identifies it as our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.\

*1 Thess 4:13-18*

*13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Unlike the unbeliever, we have great hope.

/ At the coming of the Lord, when He descends from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ shall rise. This is the resurrection of the body. \

Then we who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

/Our bodies will be transformed into bodies like His.\

John speaks of this hope too, in his first epistle:

*1 John 3:1-3*

*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Thus we end today where we began, with the writings of John.

Next Sunday, we will examine the two elements of our unity which Paul associates here with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.

<><><><><><>

/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:\

*1 Cor 1:30-31*

*30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

NASU

*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.*

NASU

/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.\

<><><><><><><><><><><>

The church has a mission. It's given a calling and a purpose by God. The mission reflects that calling, that purpose. How do we fulfill our mission?

/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.\

/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 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."*

NASU

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;*

NASU

/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.