

The Unity of Our Faith

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[0 : 00] I deal with the subject of unity. And unity is something that is profoundly difficult to human nature.

! There's a reason for that.! And I'm going to take a look at the portion that relates particularly to what we're going to be talking about this morning.

It says there in verse 6, And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eye, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord among the trees of the garden.

[1 : 19] And that's what we're going to do. Turn your Bible now to Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians chapter 4. And join me in prayer.

Father God, it is our rich privilege this morning to gather together in Your name, to hold Your Word, and to prize it, because this Word that we have is Your revelation of truth to us, and it's sufficient that the man of God can be thoroughly furnished for every good work.

And as we hold the Word this morning, we are glad to express our dependence upon the Spirit that we might both comprehend the Word and then apply it in daily living, that Christ, who is our Lord and Savior, might be manifest to others and His name glorified.

Lord, we ask Your help, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. I read that passage in Ephesians...actually, I read that passage in Genesis chapter 3 to kind of lay the groundwork to help you understand that as we go into this subject of unity this morning, and we're going to be looking more at the larger picture of what the passage has to deal with than the seven statements, and there's a reason for that.

I'm going to make the assumption that you are reasonably well-versed so that when you see a passage such as this that says, one Lord, one baptism, one faith, etc., those are not words that need to be dealt with in a great sense in terms of understanding and insight.

[3 : 21] And we're looking this morning at the fact that as you look at the book of Ephesians, if you were to break it down and outline it in a very, very simple way, you would say that the first half of the book, chapters 1 through 3, deals with what Christ has done for us or in us, and chapters 4 through 6 deal with what we are to do as a result.

Or to put it another way, you could say that in chapters 1 through 3, we see what the church is in Christ, and then we see in chapters 4 through 6 how the church is to act.

And as we open up the subject of how the church is to behave, one of the challenges that we actually have is that as we read the Scriptures, we have a tendency to read the Scriptures with a highly individualized perspective and to think about the Scriptures as instruction to us exclusively or primarily as individuals.

The fact of the matter is is that the Scriptures, most of them written as they were, and I'm referring to the New Testament and to the epistles that were written to the churches, they were not written to individuals, they were written to congregations together and their application was to all of the body of Christ, not just individual statements for individuals to enjoy.

Now I'm not going to belabor the point this morning, but I do want you to recognize that as Paul wrote of the various challenges and difficulties that were taking place in individuals' lives, his counsel and his instruction were not given in individual terms, but were given corporately.

[5 : 07] As a matter of fact, is that every word of counsel regarding the various challenges that you find in books such as 1st and 2nd Corinthians and here in the book of Ephesians is all framed in the context, the larger context of the doctrine of the church.

And no appeal is made directly to an individual. That is a profound thought and it is one that is very difficult for people to think about in our contemporary culture.

So I want you to recognize this morning that much of the counsel of Scripture really comes to us as members of his body and in terms of our relationship to him and his bride.

To put it in plain English, the call to a worthy walk, and that's really what we're dealing with in Ephesians chapter 4 on through 6, is not primarily a set of personal exhortations or commands, but it is instruction to the body of Christ collectively that this is how we as a unit are to conduct ourselves before an unbelieving generation.

With that in mind, I want us to take some time and think carefully about the subject of unity, because that's really what Paul is talking about here in the first 16 verses.

[6 : 38] He's concerned that the church at Ephesus understand the subject. There in verse 1, he says, I therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

And that's the foundation for the verses that we're going to look at this morning. And so let's talk a little bit about the matter of unity. And as we discuss the subject of unity, I think you understand that unity is something that is not well appreciated, or it is not something that is often illustrated in our contemporary culture.

We see our nation getting balkanized. And what do we mean by that? I mean, breaking up in little factions and little groups and arguments on this side and that side. And all you have to do is read the news, or better yet, all you have to do is decide which channel you're going to watch on TV. And guess what you get immediately? You get one side or the other. Instead of thinking about the larger subject of who we are as a people and what we have been put here to do, we find individuals broken up in their little factions and their interests.

And the passage that we're looking at here brings about a foundation for us that we need to understand as absolutely essential. So when we think about biblical unity, I want you to recognize this morning that biblical unity is the creation of God.

[8 : 10] Biblical unity is the creation of God. He has made us one through His Son, and that is the recurring theme of Ephesians chapter 1 through 3.

Let me say it again slowly. We have been made one through the Lord Jesus Christ. Is unity something that boils out to the fact that we all like the same things?

And what's the answer? It's not. I don't know why, but I periodically invite other people in the office to enjoy my lunches.

Now, they've always said that I'm not willing to share my wife's macaroni and cheese, and that's true. But I try to share things like sardines and rice. I get no takers. I've tried to share, you know, some of the curries that can, you know, you can light a match after you've had a bite or two. And I get no takers. There are a lot. Raw oysters, I'm really into those. Those are things that I enjoy. And I want you to understand that we have unity in the office despite the fact that they really have different attitudes towards the food I eat.

[9 : 22] Unity is not just, well, we all agree on what the menu should be. Unity is something more than that. It's the work of God in creating us out of the depravity and brokenness of our hearts and drawing us to the cross and making us one.

And we see this in a pointed way in the passage over in chapter 4, verse 3, where he says this, that we are to be eager to maintain the unity of the bond of peace, or in the bond of peace.

And this unity, it really comes out of the work of God. I want you to recognize something else in relationship. Unity, biblical unity, flows from each believer being interconnected to his body.

Think about that with me. Scripture often refers to the church as a body. In fact, it is the second most common term, I think, that is used. The first one has to do with the fact that we're family members.

And family members are connected. Is that not right? How many of you recognize that because of your relationship with certain members, biologically, that you do things and put up with things and work through things probably differently than you do with other people in the neighborhood or in

your community?

[10:36] It's because you're what? You're family. Scripture also refers to us as being part of his body. And if you were to think about that in clear terms, you'd go back, for one, to Ephesians chapter 1, verse 23.

And there it says this. It says that speaking of the church, it says, which is his body. The church is his body. And each believer is part of the larger whole.

And over that body is the head, namely Jesus Christ. In relationship to this matter of biblical unity, it may also remind you that biblical unity really flows from believers being persuaded of their divine relationship and organic connection to Christ and to one another.

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It's not something that is natural to the heart of man. It is something that rises out of an understanding of who we are and what relationship we have to Christ and what relationship we have with one another.

[11:48] It is no accident that the Holy Spirit took three chapters to explain the wonder of his grace that took miserable, wretched, rebellious sinners and saved them and put them together into his body.

And it is on the basis of that incredible union and that incredible power that was at work that we are reminded then that we are to get along and actually be in unity together.

Now, it follows, and I think it's important to recognize this, and I think you need to think with me about this, that if biblical unity is so important to Christ and important to God, we should not be surprised if Satan goes out of his way and couples with the carnal mind to oppose unity at every hand.

And I think it's important to recognize. The Bible never pictures the believer as spiritual soloists or lone rangers floating about, you know, high-o, silver, and away, and that seems to be the phraseology in some people's lives, sporadically away and away and away.

The Bible pictures us as being organically connected together and one person being part of a larger group by the providence of God placed in a place to do a work.

[13:18] I guess I'd have to say that when history writes an epitaph for evangelical Christianity in America, probably one of the things that they would say was its undoing.

was the modern phenomenon of detached and floating individualism within Christian circles. I believe firmly that lasting relationships that are founded upon the relationship with Christ are things that make for long-lasting productivity in people's spiritual lives.

And if that is true, then you need to understand that it's natural that the enemy of our souls would do everything he can to try to unhinge that. Would you agree with that?

You've heard me say this, and it's so profoundly true, that individual wildebeests, here we go back to the Serengeti plain, and some of you are thinking, where is he going with this?

But here's the deal. Solo wildebeests are lion's lunches. Do you understand that? And I've watched that over and over again in the lives of believers. As they begin to detach from the body of Christ and slip off into the dark, they end up being unintentionally caught and snared by Satan.

[14:47] Well, in case you didn't figure it out by now, I am an enthusiast for the local church. If you ask me one of the things that I am, I'm a lover of the bride of Christ.

I can say that with passion, and I can say that with scriptural conviction, and I can say that because of personal experience. Let's think now of the foundation of biblical unity.

We talked about the nature of it. God's the one who puts it together. But let's talk about the foundation. And let me have you note several recurring words. We're in Ephesians chapter 4. And I have to confess that on Wednesday, I remember Thursday was what?

It was the 4th of July, and I wasn't in the office. I was booking it to be ready for Sunday by Wednesday. And I actually, by Tuesday, I had put together what was going to happen. And I came in Wednesday, and I said, I think I'm going to have to change this one.

I've got actually probably three sermons on Ephesians chapter 4, verse 4 through 6. And we're not going to have all three of them today. In fact, you're just going to have to get on with it and do your own study.

[15:56] Having said that, I want you to look at the larger picture of what we find in this passage. And one of the things that I want you to recognize is Paul uses some recurring words, and they're

signals.

He uses the word one seven times. One, one, one, one. He just keeps on saying it. And each one is connected to a theological truth. Furthermore, he uses, and we come towards the end and look at verse 6, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

So you've got two sets of really strong words that Paul just kind of tags again and again and again. He wants to be sure you get it. One, one, one, one, seven times. And all, all, all, all, four times.

What's he saying? He wants us not to miss the fact that biblical unity, this oneness, is a significant and serious business.

Furthermore, I want you to understand that biblical unity is really based on the Godhead. And this is something that you may not see immediately in the passage, but recognize. And this is a little trick, not trick, but it's a little principle to Bible study.

[17:14] Bible truths are not just kind of scattered around sporadically and irresponsibly. There is an organic unity to the Scriptures. And in that our God is triune, and what do we mean by that?

We mean God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit, three in one. You will find often that theological and doctrinal truths come together in that organic unity of the Trinity.

And so as we are looking at this passage, Paul, as he teaches us about our unity in the body, he can't help himself but draw it together and say, and remind yourself that God is one.

And so we find this unity that in its discussion of its theological foundation or the truth that it rests on, we find that Paul can't help himself but remind us of the unity of the Godhead.

And as you look here, we find that these principles that we're looking at are all connected to the triune God, beginning first with the Spirit, and then the Lord Jesus Christ, and then finally God the Father.

[18:26] And you find there in verse 4 there's one body, one Spirit, just as you're called to one hope, talking about the Spirit of God. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, talking about the Lord Jesus, and one God and Father, talking about God the Father.

And it's instructive as we look at this to remind ourselves that at the heart of all we do and how we live out our life is our view of God. If He is at the center of our life, then His values and His glory will shine through.

Let me say that again slowly because I think so many people miss this, and their lives are reflective of the fact they've missed it. The heart of all that we do and how we live out our life is reflective of our view of God.

People get to see who you believe God is by the way you act. I had an individual say to me not too long ago, I'm having trouble trust God.

And one of the advantages of lasting relationships is sometimes you can set a phrase or a statement like that against the context of, you know, 20 years of experience, and you say, well, you know, I'm not sure that you're really having a problem trusting God.

[19:54] Now, what pastor would ever say anything like that? Here's what I said to follow up. I think your bigger problem is you're not convinced you're not God. Let me play that out for you so you can understand it.

People who have a high degree of problem with anxiety and worry are really expressing a legitimate theological truth about who they worship.

What do I mean by that? If you are the sum of the world you live in, and you're concerned about all the different things happening in it, it's understandable that you would be anxious because guess what?

You have a lot of empirical evidence that you really can't handle any detail. So if you're the center, it's reasonable for you to be worried and anxious.

Be anxious for nothing. What does that verse presuppose? It presupposes that you know God's on the throne, that He is in control.

[21:07] Right? For I have said, I'll never leave you or forsake you. I want you to think about this.

The way we act reflects our true theology. All of God's people said, Amen! Good. I caught you on that one.

Okay, okay. Here we go. Unity, being organically connected to church, and walking in a manner that honors Christ, is all really connected to who we believe is God.

Unity, and being organically connected to the church, and walking in a manner that honors Christ, is all connected to who we really believe is God. I believe one of the reasons for the anemic spirituality

of contemporary Christianity is because so many contemporary believers really see themselves as independent free agents doing their own thing.

And as a result, they're caught up more engaged in a dance troupe, or a drama group, or a Bible study group, or a baseball team, and so on. The body of Christ is a secondary issue in their lives. [22 : 26] I mean, it's not where they get their means of fulfillment. It's just one of those things they do on Sunday. In every case, a low view of God leads to a low view of how important it is for an individual to be bound up in kingdom relationships.

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You may not like the statement, and if it causes a little angst, here's my singular appeal, that you argue your rebuttal with me scripturally.

One of the passages that kind of sticks in my mind, and it's one of those that I live by a little bit, Shulamite woman. How many of you know the story? In the Old Testament, Shulamite woman, okay? Here, when the prophet, I think it's Elijah, Elijah, Elijah, I think it is.

Elijah says, hey, can I bless you? Remember, she'd been so nice to the prophet, and he thought, well, let me help her out. So he calls her in, says, hey, can I do anything for you?

[23 : 59] Here's what she says. This is a good one. I dwell among my own people. That's all she said. Do you know what she was saying? I have all I need in the relationships that God has given me in my family construct.

Another point that I want to make is that biblical unity rests on biblical truth. Biblical unity rests on biblical truth. That's really what we're looking at in verses 4, 5, and 6, and you're wondering, why did you take so long to get there?

Here's the reason. Many people today do not see themselves as really organically connected to the bride of Christ.

Biblical unity rests on biblical truth.

Let me read these statements to you. One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

[25 : 24] Man, that is dynamite. Second, I want you to understand that unity has no disconnect from scriptural truth.

In fact, when there is a disconnect from scriptural truth, there is a breakdown in the effectiveness of honoring God and allowing the Scriptures to do its job.

Our unity is not the result. And I want you to understand this. In the fellowship of saints, our unity is not the result of compromise, but is the power of God orienting our hearts individually towards His central person and glory.

I don't know. How many of you remember science class when you were growing up and the teacher would bring in iron filings and throw them out on a piece of glass or something like that? Does anybody besides me remember?

It's the little bit of science I remember. Okay. You know, those iron filings are all over the place, everywhere, you know? And then what does she do to convince you of the power of the magnet?

[26 : 32] What does she do? Under the piece of glass, she kind of gets it to the right, and suddenly what happens to all those iron filings? They're on point. There's not a one of them.

Not a one of them is a deviant. Because they know the magnets around. Now, before I go, where are you going?

I'm staying here. But before I leave this point, you may be wondering, why are there so many diverse denominations and sincere beliefs among Christians?

Christians? It's hard for me to admit this, but my sister is a Presbyterian. Hi, Michelle. You know, people ask me, so what are you?

I say, well, the truth of the matter is, is I'm a quasi-charismatic, Reformed Baptist. And that always launches people into, what do you mean by that?

[27 : 45] And I have enough trouble being Tim Kenoyer, let alone a quasi-reformed Presbyterian Baptist, whatever, you know. So here's the deal. Believers who know Christ hold to core beliefs across the broad spectrum.

My sister and I, though we may differ on some nuanced differences, we believe Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And we know that no one comes to Christ except they are burdened for their sin and they realize the despair of their state and they call upon the name of the Lord.

And what it says in Scripture is whosoever believes, what shall have everlasting life. Now, it is true that at Thanksgiving dinner we don't discuss baptism.

But we get along. Okay. And I am not troubled by these differences.

[29 : 00] I view them in some senses as being familial differences much like the fact that in your family you probably do some things different than we do in our family.

You probably have some dietary differences. I think you all should eat the way we do, but you know, you don't and I still think you're good. You know what I'm saying? It doesn't bother me. And I think we get arguing about things that really don't have any bearing on eternity.

One of the things I happen to really have enjoyed over the years is going consistently to the Basics Conference with Alistair Begg. He's amillennial. He is reformed. He's different than I am.

But every time we go up there he has one Baptist, one Anglican, and one Presbyterian preach. And there's a three-day conference. And what they preach about is Jesus.

And they preach about the supremacy of the Word. And I come back from that thing with my heart on fire. And frankly, I just really get into these little petty familial discussions as I get older that are less important.

[30 : 10] Now, there are personal differences, but they are not to become points of contention. Let me give you two illustrations of this.

One is Harry Ironsides, who was a pastor at Moody Church in Chicago. This was before airplanes. And this was when in order to go from Chicago to the West Coast where he was preaching, he had to get in a train and ride in a train.

And the morning broke and he was riding along and he opened up his Bible and began to read it. And along comes one person and says, what you reading? And he says, I'm reading my Bible. The person said, can I sit down with you?

And they read the Bible together and they discussed it. A second day, the crowd had grown fairly substantial. Harry Ironsides was a very influential godly man.

The crowd had grown large by the time they reached the station. And one lady who was a very pronounced German accent person, she comes and says, what denomination are you?

[31 : 13] He said, well, I am the denomination that David was. She says, what denomination is that?

And he recited the passage in Psalm 112 where David says this, Psalm 119, verse 63, he says, I am companion to all them who fear you.

That's who we're part of. Another illustration, and I really like this one, is George Whitefield and John Wesley represented two radical perspectives. George Whitefield was reformed in his thinking, believed in the sovereignty of God and election, and John Wesley was very much, you know, free grace and, well, both free grace, but talking about the will of man and freedom of man's will, et cetera.

And there ended up being somewhat of a dispute between John and George Whitefield. And here is what George Whitefield did when he recognized that the dispute was gaining traction.

He wrote a letter to John Wesley, Arminian, Wesleyan, and he pled with John that their differences not destroy their communion or their brotherly love.

[32 : 35] He pled with John. He says, listen, let us both offer free grace through the blood of Christ and not belabor our differences. Grumping and stumping around about those differences will do no more than create division and turmoil in the body of Christ.

And it's unprofitable. So as you think about the subject this morning, I want you to recognize that prioritizing biblical unity is important.

It really is. First, a persistent lack of sensitivity to biblical unity may be an indication of the fact you don't know Christ.

You may know about Him as a historical figure, but really is He your Savior? Because going back to the illustration of the iron filings, if Christ is the one who is the center of your life, then your relationship to other people is affected by that relationship.

Biblical unity is important because He put us together for His glory and He intends for us to be in relationship first with Him and then with one another.

[33 : 54] And when we are in right relationship with Him, then our relationships relationships with one another are not discolored or marred.

Second, and I speak with a certain amount of caution here, an indifference to the organic unity of the body of Christ is reflective of a diminished view of God and His Word.

So let me say that again slowly. A diminished view of the importance of the organic unity of the body.

I'm connected. I dwell among my own people. Do you follow that? This is my body. No, no. Say that again. This is His body and I'm a little part of it.

But I cannot imagine myself today being disconnected from the body of Christ.

[35 : 04] Let me tell you something. I have sweet relationships in the biological family that God has made me part of. But unless the grace of God intervenes, not every member of my family will be in eternity with me.

But I, connected as I am to the bride of Christ, know that I will see you again in eternity and I will serve gladly and joyfully with you here because someday we will be together again.

And Tim Kenoyer regularly reminds himself of men such as Bob Charrington, Bill Driscoll, Hal Burchett, men who were part of the bride of Christ and significant in relationship and communion with me and an encouragement in my pursuit.

Beloved, to have a low view of the significance and the importance of the body of Christ should give you pause.

Ephesians chapter 4 verse 4. There's one body and one spirit just as you were called to one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

[36 : 54] If you're not part of the body of Christ, Christ Jesus came into the world to die for sinners and he offers you salvation and the alienation, the emptiness, the fear of judgment cannot be taken away apart from calling upon the name of the Lord and saying, I am a wretched sinner who deserves judgment.

Yet I hear what you say, Jesus died for me and I want him as my Savior. And if you are here today and do not know Christ, I would plead with you.

Be reconciled. Let's pray. Father God, this morning, there's so much in this passage that is fitting and valuable to the believer to make a difference in the way we live and act and walk and how we glorify the Lord Jesus together.

And I rely upon your spirit to take your word and to make a difference in people's lives. Believers, that they would grow in their affection for you and their willingness to be part of the body of Christ to serve together for your glory.

And unbelievers, that this morning by your incredible kindness, you would draw them to see the misery and the bankruptcy of their state and they would call upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom alone is salvation.

[38 : 44] We ask this in your precious name. Amen.