

Unity in the Body of Christ

Unity

Ephesians 4:4-6

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Unity

Scripture

Last week I begin a new series of sermons in Ephesians 4:1-16 that I am calling, “Unity in the Body of Christ.”

In Ephesians 1-3 the Apostle Paul deals primarily with doctrine. He sets down a number of glorious doctrines about predestination, election, adoption, redemption, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the work of God in joining people from all nations into the one body of Christ.

In Ephesians 4-6 the Apostle Paul deals primarily with application. He applies in very concrete ways how the glorious doctrines apply to Christian believers in Christ’s Church.

In Ephesians 4:1-3 the Apostle Paul teaches Christian believers about the call to a worthy walk. And then he explains what it is that characterizes the walk of every Christian believer. He says that every Christian is characterized—perhaps not in full bloom, but certainly in germ form—by humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and unity. And then he goes on in verses 4-6 to explain the biblical foundation of this unity.

Let’s read about unity in Ephesians 4:4-6:

⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Introduction

A man was stranded all alone on a deserted island. He

sent smoke signals daily, hoping that someone would see it and find him. Ten years elapsed and finally a ship passed by.

The captain of the ship was notified about the smoke signals, and he decided to see what was going on at the island.

When he got close to shore, he saw a man and three huts. The captain of the ship sent a small boat to rescue the man. When the man got on board the ship, he embraced the captain and thanked him profusely for rescuing him.

“I am glad to be able to help you,” said the captain. “Where are the others?”

“What others?” said the man, “I am alone. I am the only one on this island.”

“Well then,” asked the captain, with a confused expression, “if you are alone, why are there three huts on the island?”

“Oh, that! I can explain,” said the man. “The first hut is my home. That is where I live. And the hut next to it is where I go to church.”

“And the third hut?” asked the captain.

The man said, “Oh! That is where I used to go to church!”

We smile at that story, but it really reflects a sad reality. Far too many Christians do not understand the biblical foundation of unity in the church.

Lesson

Ephesians 4:4-6 shows us the biblical foundation of unity in the church.

Let's use the following outline:

1. There Is One Body (4:4a)
2. There Is One Spirit (4:4b)
3. There Is One Hope (4:4c)
4. There Is One Lord (4:5a)

5. There Is One Faith (4:5b)
6. There Is One Baptism (4:5c)
7. There Is One God (4:6)

I. There Is One Body (4:4a)

First, there is one body.

Paul writes in verse 4a, **“There is one body....”**

The word **“body”** is a metaphor for the church. Boice points out, “There are many good metaphors for the church in Scripture, even within this one letter. It is compared to a kingdom, a family, and a temple in chapter 2. In chapter 5 it is compared to a bride.”¹ However, comparing the church to a **“body”** is a great metaphor because a human body is a unified, organic entity. Each part of the body has life and contributes to the well-being of the entire body. Each part of the body is necessary for the proper functioning of the entire body.

Paul used the same metaphor when he wrote to the Corinthian church, stressing the unity and interdependence of each member of the body. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:14–27, “For the body does not consist of one member but of many.... The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty.... But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expository Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1988), 127.

member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:14; 21–27).

Tony Merida writes, “We share a common existence in Christ’s church. We are diverse in background and gifting, but we are united as one.”²

So, the first biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body.

II. There Is One Spirit (4:4b)

Second, there is one Spirit.

Paul writes in verse 4b, “There is... **one Spirit**...”

The *English Standard Version* has capitalized the word “**Spirit**.” The Greek word is *pneuma*, and it may be used for “breath, spirit, or Spirit.” Context determines its meaning, and here in verse 4b Paul is saying that the church is **one** because of the work of the Holy Spirit. I like how Boice explains it. He writes:

When they give testimonies, people tend to emphasize variety. But when Paul says that there is not only one body but “one Spirit,” he is undoubtedly asking us to think of the way in which the Holy Spirit works unvaryingly in all who come to Jesus. We have many differences in the small particulars of our conversions. But when we begin to talk about what the Holy Spirit did in our hearts to bring us to faith in Christ, our experiences are identical. There is an *awakening to sin* whereby we become conscious that all is not right between ourselves and God, that we are in violation of his laws, hostile to his holy character, and under his wrath. There is the work

² Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), n.p.

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of *regeneration*, whereby God in a supernatural way places the new life of Christ within our hearts so that we change. We become different from what we were before. There is the *work of faith* which follows upon that whereby, having been made alive in Christ by the Holy Spirit, we are drawn by that same Spirit to place our faith in Jesus. Following that, there is the work of the Holy Spirit in *sanctification*, which produces the same fruit of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23)—in all of us.³

Tony Merida writes, “We share a common origin in the Holy Spirit’s work. The Spirit is the One who creates unity and empowers us to maintain it.”⁴

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body and one Spirit.

III. There Is One Hope (4:4c)

Third, there is one hope.

Paul writes in verse 4c, “There is... **one hope that belongs to your call....**”

When we use the word “hope” today, we think about something uncertain that we wish will happen. We say, “I hope it will rain today,” or, “I hope that our baseball team will win.” Biblical **hope**, however, means “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial.”⁵ It is something that is sure and certain.

When Paul writes about the “**one hope that belongs to your call**” he means that Christian believers are united in Jesus

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Ephesians: An Expositional Commentary*, 128.

⁴ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

⁵ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 295.

Christ and look forward to being with him for all eternity.

Tony Merida writes, “We share a common hope in Christ. Formerly, we were ‘without hope’ (2:12) until we were called to Christ. Now we have hope, and we must live in a manner worthy of our calling.”⁶

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body, one Spirit, and one hope.

IV. There Is One Lord (4:5a)

Fourth, there is one Lord.

Paul writes in verse 5a, “There is... **one Lord...**”

That **one Lord** is of course Jesus Christ. Our salvation is centered in the person and work of Jesus. He is central to the saving work of every Christian believer. Referring to Jesus, Luke wrote in Acts 4:12, “And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Tony Merida writes, “Believers confess and proclaim, ‘Jesus Christ as Lord’ (2 Corinthians 4:5). When the early Christians said, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ they were saying, ‘Caesar is not lord.’ When Jewish Christians said this, they were boldly identifying Jesus with the God of the Hebrew Scriptures (cf. Deuteronomy 6:4). So this was not merely an empty creedal affirmation for early believers. This confession could cause you to lose your head.”⁷

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, and one Lord.

⁶ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

⁷ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

V. There Is One Faith (4:5b)

Fifth, there is one faith.

Paul writes in verse 5b, “There is... **one faith...**”

“**Faith**” can be used either subjectively or objectively. Subjectively, it refers to our exercise of belief. Objectively, it refers to the content of what is revealed in the Word of God. In biblical Christianity there is only **one faith**, “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Tony Merida writes, “The creed reminds us that we embrace the essential truths together, for ‘faith’ here seems to refer to the body of truth we believe.”⁸

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, and one faith.

VI. There Is One Baptism (4:5c)

Sixth, there is one baptism.

Paul writes in verse 5c, “There is... **one baptism...**”

It is interesting that Paul listed baptism as one of the biblical foundations of unity in the church since there is significant disagreement over the subject and mode of baptism. Should infants be baptized? And should baptism be done by sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? However, Paul is not addressing questions regarding subject or mode of baptism. Instead, he is referring to what baptism signifies, namely, identification with Christ. That is what unifies believers. Believers publicly identify with Jesus Christ.

Tony Merida writes, “We share a common experience of

⁸ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

being spiritually baptized into Christ. We are united with Him. The act of baptism into water pictures this reality. This ordinance may be in view here.”⁹

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism.

VII. There Is One God (4:6)

And seventh, there is one God.

Paul writes in verse 6, “There is... **one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**”

The basic creedal statement of believers in the Old Testament was, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Yet the Bible, and especially the New Testament, reveals that the **one God** is in three Persons—**Father**, Son, and Holy Spirit. John MacArthur writes, “**God the Father** is often used in Scripture as the most comprehensive and inclusive divine title, though it is clear from many New Testament texts that He is never separated in nature or power from the Son or the Holy Spirit.”¹⁰

Tony Merida writes, “As His adopted children, we share the same Father (cf. Ephesians 1:5). He is the God over all and the Father of all His children—regardless of their ethnicities. We are one big, adopted family.”¹¹

Interestingly, the unities in verse 4 refer to the Holy Spirit, the unities in verse 5 refer to Jesus Christ, and the unity in verse 6 refers to God the Father. That leads John Stott to say that

⁹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

¹⁰ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Ephesians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 131.

¹¹ Tony Merida, David Platt, and Daniel L. Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, n.p.

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the Trinity is the basis for church unity, which he summarizes as follows, “We must assert that there *can* be only one Christian family, only one Christian faith, hope and baptism, and only one Christian body, because there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You can no more multiply churches than you can multiply Gods. Is there only one God? Then he has only one church. Is the unity of God inviolable? Then so is the unity of the church. The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead.”¹²

So, the biblical foundation of unity in the church is that there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the concept of unity in Ephesians 4:4-6, let us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

I would like to close this message with the following illustration, given by Pete Briscoe:

In the early 70's, my parents were leading a church in Wisconsin. This church served 300 hard-working, salt-of-the-earth Midwesterners. But there was a family whose older children didn't fit into the suit, tie, and Bible-carrying culture of Sunday mornings. So they started a Bible study at their house and before they knew it, 200 hippies were gathering in their home. Yeah. Peace signs, bell bottoms, crocheted halter tops, the whole works.

¹² John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 151.

Soon enough, the hippies asked, “When do we get to come to your church?”

And with one question, and for one Sunday, attendance at our church nearly doubled. But it was a major culture clash as the tribal rules of our church had a head-on collision with those from the outside. The church “won.” The next Sunday only 20 hippies came. The third Sunday, only one showed up. Yup, just one courageous soul came barefoot in holey jeans, and sat cross-legged on the floor right in front of the platform, willing to break our isolating tribal rules.

He wouldn’t give in. That young man stayed and attended membership class with those suit-clad members who looked at him a bit strangely and gave him the cold shoulder. At the end of the class, as part of his membership requirements, he stood to share his story:

“I didn’t know Jesus until two months ago. I’ve got so much to learn and one of the things I’ve learned is that I’m supposed to hang out with you people.... I’ve read the Bible. I’ve got to love you so I’m gonna choose to love you even though you have shown no love to me.”

Ouch.

Then he asked, “Can I talk with someone about how we can do this better than we’ve been doing it?” An older man stood up and invited the hippie to lunch. Together they came up with a plan to build relationships between the two cultures. Tribal rules faded. Divisions erased. Invitations extended. Isolation broken.... And several pairs of bare feet graced the doors of our church once again.¹³

They had come to understand the biblical foundation of church unity. And they had to work hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

May we as a church do so as well. Amen.

¹³ See <https://www.lightsource.com/ministry/telling-the-truth/devotionals/experiencing-life-today-with-pete-briscoe/experiencing-life-today-may-6-2014-11711929.html>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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