

BLESSEDNESS OF THE TRUTH: THE UNITY OF THE CHURCH

Intro: - We have looked at the identity of the church: the invisible, organic, spiritual body of Christ, manifesting herself visibly in local congregations!

-And we have made a personal confession, By grace I am and forever shall remain a living member thereof.

-Now Scripture presents the church as a glorious unity. What do we mean by this? What picture comes to mind when you think of ONE church?

I. WHAT KIND OF UNITY BELONGS TO THE CHURCH?

- A. Those who maintain that the unity of the church must be a visible unity
 1. Appealing to John 17:21, these groups push for ecumenical relations.
 2. In the past, parachurch organizations 'Promise Keepers', and 'Rome and Evangelicals Together' push for visible unity.
 3. In some Bible Study groups, there has been the push to stay away from particular doctrines for the sake of unity.
 4. Even in the Reformed camp there were those that dared to say that the Reformation was wrong.
 5. If the unity of the church must be a visible one, it was wrong to break from the one denomination, Roman Catholic Church
- B. Others stress independent churches.
 1. Not union, no federation, each church on its own.
 2. They do this out of fear of hierarchy in the church.
 3. They believe that unity of the church is possible only when Christ returns.
 4. This emphasis is as dangerous and sinful as the ecumenical movement.
- C. The Reformed stress that the unity of the church is a spiritual unity. The church of all ages from all nations and tribes are one
 1. As we stated last week, the church is an object of faith: "I believe in a holy catholic church."
 2. The Catechism goes on to say, "all and every one who believes, being members of Christ are in common partakers..."
 3. Eph 4: Paul urges that they make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- D. What about diversity? Why division?
 1. Its origin is in human sin: sin in our individual lives and the imperfection of the church.
 2. There is necessary division because of apostasy and heresy, forcing one to come out and be separate.
 3. There is also good diversity: different languages, cultures, separation because of distance.
 4. Multifariousness does not and ought not to obscure the unity of the church, but rather makes it stand out more clearly!

II. THE NATURE OF OUR UNITY: THE UNITY OF THE UNIVERSAL BODY OF CHRIST.

- A. The true church is a perfect unity. Eph. 4 brings this out.
 1. First, there **must** be only one church because there is only one God (vs. 6), "One God and father..."
 2. Second, there **can** be only one church, because there is one Lord (vs.5), "One Lord..."
 3. Third, there **is** only one church, because there is one Spirit (vs. 4), "One Spirit..."
- B. Christ prays for this unity and creates it. Christ is the source. Without Christ, there is only sin and division in human race.
 1. In Jesus' prayer, he is very conscious that the church is sinful and living in a sinful world. They must be kept (John 17).
 2. As the head rules the body, so the mind of Christ influences and controls the mind of the believer and church (Phil 2:1,2).
 3. The will of Christ is supreme: He administers the will of God (Phil. 2:12,13).
 4. The heart of Christ pulsates in the church working love (I John 4:7-10).
 5. So this unity is the WORK OF CHRIST ALONE (Eph. 2:22). The way to greater unity is drawing ever nearer to Christ.
- C. There is unity only in the truth.
 1. The HC says, "all agreeing in true faith (QA 54) members in perfect agreement and harmony, spiritually united.
 2. Christ as he received the Spirit dwells in the body and its members. This is the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17).
 3. The Spirit of Christ guides the church into all the truth (John 16:13).
 4. Christ gave apostles prophets, evangelists and still gives pastors and teachers that we may come in unity of faith (vs.11)
 5. We are to speak the truth in love (vs. 15).
 6. We are a confessional church. We gather and are joined by the three forms of unity.
- D. How do we manifest this unity?
 1. There is the problem of not only of natural causes of separation: distance, language, race, and nationality.
 2. There are spiritual causes: doctrine, confession, worship, and government.
 3. We manifest unity **not** by elimination of doctrine and creeds in order to fashion an outward unity,
 4. But by growing in Christ, appropriating Christ in and from Scripture, not less doctrine but more doctrine & instruction.

III. IMPLICATIONS OF OUR UNITY.

- A. Because faith is living, faith about church unity shows itself in "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit (Eph.4:3)."
 1. Speak the truth in love (Eph.4:15).
 2. With lowliness, meekness, love, in the bond of peace.
 3. Means that we personally learn the truth, love and embrace and defend the truth.
 4. We must do that in the local congregation even as sin and Satan seeks to divide and lead astray.
 5. We do that as a federation of churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches.
 6. We do this through our contact committee establishing relations with other churches that share our confessional basis.
 7. Doing evangelism, printing literature, and praying for the universal church of Jesus Christ.
- B. We stand opposed to independentism.
 1. There are differences. Not all churches hold to the same doctrines and walk the same pathway through life.
 2. This causes confusion and unrest, some harshly judging and refusing to have any part in the church.
 3. Others are determined to correct this wrong and try to unite all believers no matter what it takes.
 4. We openly profess that there is unity in the church and she is One. We pray for spiritual unity.
 5. We believe that it is our part to join this church, unite her in faith, and look forward for her perfection in heaven.