

One Lord

Ephesians 4:4-6

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)

As we look at the world around us, and as we consider carefully the words in this passage, we can easily see that the world is so very clever in its ways, often commandeering principles and ideas from these scriptures and using them for its own purposes, and then also skillfully inserting its ways and its philosophies back into church.

And I confess that for much of my life, I have often been a willing participant in some of the systems the world employs.

In reading these words about “unity” within the Body of Christ, I’m reminded of how the corporate world strives daily for these same goals, “unity” and “oneness in purpose and goals”. Business plans are filled to the brim with those kinds of ideas and methodologies.

And why would that so? It is because the concepts really do work well in most all group undertakings! Simply put, “unity” and “oneness” are excellent concepts that work!

And may I take this point one step further and say that the closer these philosophies of “unity” and “oneness” are administered to the manner in which these scriptures recommend, the more success they will enjoy.

And so, both as a secular business leader when I was a banker, and then later in my years of management at French Camp, I was constantly applying these principles, often working behind the scenes to bring “consensus” within our groups, and implementing “team-building” philosophies, all for the purpose of creating “unity” and “oneness” within the groups.

But with all that being said, may I also quickly warn us that if the Spirit of Christ is not kept firmly at the center of these philosophies, they will not always work out well in the long run.

And why would that be so . . . simply because without the Spirit of Christ, such philosophies are devoid of the real power necessary to make them “really work”! Those words from 2 Timothy 3 . . .

5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Timothy 3:5)

We must remind ourselves that the “Unity” spoken about here in these scriptures is not merely an idea or a philosophy. This “unity” is not that mystical “aura of oneness” that the secular world perceives it to be. And as this “unity” is sought within our Christian endeavors, we must be careful not to confuse what is taking place.

Real and true “Spiritual unity” is embodied within a Person, the Person of God. And here in our scripture text God is telling us,

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)

Here in these words, God holds nothing back in His emphatic resolve about the need for “oneness” within the Body of Christ. And while yes, this “unity”, this oneness” does require some degree of “human effort” on our part, it is a “oneness” at a whole other level, a “spiritual unity” that transcends any ability that our human efforts might muster, a “unity” that is empowered by the presence of God Himself.

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

And this “unity” is not just to some proportional degree. This “unity” is absolutely all “of God, by Him, for Him and through Him”, a “galvanizing togetherness” of oneness in hope, oneness in desire, oneness in purpose, oneness in thought, oneness in deed, and oneness in demeanor and behavior, with His presence at the very center and heart of it all.

In His prayer for His disciples just before He was crucified, Jesus prayed for this special mystical and blessed “Oneness” that would bind them together in “unity”. There He said,

15 (Father) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

18 As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sake I consecrate (I sanctify) myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

20 “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:15-23)

Here in these words of Jesus, He is asking God the Father to “sanctify”, to “set apart”, His disciples, both those that He had with Him at that time and also those of us who would later receive Him as Savior, you and me to separate us out into a special “body”, one that is formed and consecrated for one purpose, to glorify the Father.

And no, this separation would not mean that we would be “raptured away” from the world and from the people of this world. To the contrary, we would intentionally remain in the world intertwined with them, much as Jesus described in the “Parable of the Weeds”. But yet, even though intertwined within the world and its people, we believers would be “united together” separately as one Body, a peculiar people “set apart” for the purposes of God.

And may I repeat myself again by saying that this is a completely “impossible” assignment. That is why our “unity” must first be filled with the presence of

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

Matthew Henry, in his commentary on these words in Ephesians 4, said . . .

“Consider how many unities there are that are the joy and glory of our Christian profession. There should be one heart; for there is one body, and one spirit . . . If there be but one body, all that belong to that body should have one heart. The church is one mystical body of Christ, and all good Christians make up but one body, incorporated by one charter, that of the gospel, animated by one Spirit, the same Holy Spirit who by his gifts and graces quickens, enlivens, and governs that body. If we belong to Christ, we are all moved in what we do by one and the same Spirit, and therefore should be one.”

I must confess that I am acutely aware of all that is emphasized for us in these words. Working all our many years there in the ministry at French Camp, “unity of the Spirit” was an absolute requirement if peace was to prevail and ministry was to be accomplished.

And difficulties did sometimes arise. But may I say that the difficulties that we encountered seldom were ever of a blatant sinful kind and nature. I recall very, very few of those.

The problems that did arise seemed most to come from simple differences in ideas and philosophies and procedures and methodologies, each person wanting the Lord’s Will, and each wanting the best for the children and the co-workers, but each having such a diverse thought about how it all should be accomplished, and because of that, divisions arose.

And, yes, granted, sometimes because of those diverse opinions and philosophies, discussions would become heated and argumentative, sometimes causing long-term disruptions in relationships. And that really would be “blatantly sinful”.

But just as God is saying to us here in the words of our text, those kinds of sinful behavior are always “curable” through . . .

2 . . . humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2-3)

But to have this “cure” always at work within us, we must be firmly committed to the faith that . . .

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

As I read these words, I am convicted about the divisions that also exist between churches and between denominations.

Last week, as we were traveling home, my wife and I listened to a debate taking place on the radio between two men of opposing viewpoints of doctrine, one a “Calvinist”, the other an “Arminian”. And as the two men talked, though they were especially “civil” to each other, they were nonetheless very divergent in some of their beliefs. And I must say that I grieved for their differences.

In a similar circumstance, a very heated national debate is currently taking place, brought on by the recent release of a book written by one of the best bible scholars of our time, John MacArthur . . . the book entitled “Strange Fire”.

Dr. MacArthur is what is known as a “cessationist”. He believes that certain charismatic gifts, such as, prophecy and speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues ceased to exist after the first century.

And last October, Dr. MacArthur used his “Strange Fire” book and a “conference” to speak out against what he considers unbiblical aspects of the charismatic movement, insisting that members of the movement have been attributing to the Holy Spirit things that are unbiblical.

Most of the bible scholars from the Charismatic Denominations have, of course, taken strong issue with MacArthur’s contentions. But then so also have some within what would be called MacArthur’s own camp, one of those being John Piper.

These two men, John MacArthur and John Piper are certainly two of the most respected Christian leaders and bible scholars in our nation today, both strong Calvinists and both preaching Reformed theology, but differing widely on this particular matter.

May I quickly say that their disagreement is not at all “heated”, but there is disagreement nonetheless!

John Piper is called a “continuationist”. And he supports the belief that the Holy Spirit continues today to empower Christians with all the same spiritual gifts that were given to the first century church.

May I insert here that I am also a “continuationist”. I also believe that the Holy Spirit continues today to empower Christians with all the spiritual gifts as He deems appropriate, giving to each person as He “wills”. Nowhere do these scriptures declare that any of these spiritual gifts have ceased to be.

When questioned about why he believes that some of the “Spiritual gifts” have ceased to be, MacArthur responds that while there are no specific scriptures that declare those “gifts” to have ceased, there are numerous scriptures that point to that conclusion. And he provides several of those scripture texts.

And others who argue in favor of MacArthur’s conclusion, site the fact that although the word “Trinity” equally cannot be found in the scriptures, we still believe in the “Trinity” because there are so many, many scriptures that infer it.

As I have listened to these debates taking place, I have had to conclude that while we must not shy away from “digging deeply” into the ways and the mysteries of God, we really must conclude that some apparent “paradoxes” and “mysteries”, such as these, might never be fully reconciled within our minds. We are simply not in possession of enough knowledge and wisdom from God to understand them rightly.

And yes, there are a “hundred-fold” more such “paradoxes” and “mysteries” that earnest men and women of God will disagree about. And unfortunately, the church will continue to suffer because of those disagreements.

Who or what could be called the main culprit in these disagreements? What can be faulted? I must say that I blame it mostly on the one thing that can separate us in our “unity” and in our “oneness”, and that is “free-will”, our incessant need to have “claim to our right to our self”.

We read a scripture or an article in a publication and immediately our minds begin to form opinions and beliefs, some of them right and some of them wrong. And again, most often the differences are not between “good” and “evil”, but rather between “good” and “the best”.

And again, as we said last week, as long as satan can keep us arguing between ourselves, no matter whether our point of disagreement be blatantly sinful or not, he still takes away “small wins” in his efforts to defeat Christ in us.

What must we return to, and what must we cling to if we truly hope to have the “unity of the Spirit” that God intends for us? He gives us that answer in these words of our text. He tells us here that there is but

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

There really is not a “Calvinist God”, or an “Arminian God”, or a “Charismatic God. There really is only One God, who is God over all of these doctrinal and denominational differences,

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

And this must be the standard and the course that you and I pursue if we are ever to remain at peace with all people, especially our fellow believers within the household of faith. You and I are to “seek peace” and to “pursue it”, knowing that the people in the

churches that meet around us each Sunday truly are worshipping the very same God that we are worshipping,

5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:5-6)

Yes, we may differ in whether we believe in “once saved, always saved”. And we might differ in the manner and mode of our use of water in baptism. And we might differ in whether we lift up “holy hands” to the Lord.

But such things are minor and they must not separate us in our fellowship.

May I close today by simply calling us to a fresh commitment to “unity” within this body of Christ!

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:2-6)