

Together as One:

Why the Church Should Embrace Unity in a Divisive World

April 30, 2023 - Pastor Dennis Campbell

Spiritual unity was a significant part of the lives and teachings of the early church. In Ephesians 4:1-7, Paul instructs us to do everything possible to safeguard or maintain the unity of the spirit.

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

The assumption appears to be that spiritual unity is the norm whenever the church and its members live under the control of the Holy Spirit. Keeping the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace should be the primary concern of every believer.

The Source of Unity

Spiritual unity doesn't come from the outside. It comes from the inside.

Spiritual unity can never be created by the church. It's not man made. Unity is divinely imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. First Corinthians 12:13 says:

For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

How many spirits? By *one* spirit. We were all baptized into one body. How many bodies? *One* body. Whether Jew or Greeks, slaves or free, we all have been made to partake of one spirit. First Corinthians 12: 20 says:

But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body.

It's the Holy Spirit that draws us together with other believers and creates that oneness that Jesus prayed for in John chapter 17:20-21. Listen to His prayer.

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for- those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

When we are unified, Jesus is glorified.

The world is always seeking, but never finding unity. Throughout recorded history, every treaty made by man has been broken.

Civilization as we know it stands on the verge of collapse. The world can't keep going this way. Isaiah 48:22 says:

"There is no peace," says the LORD, *"for the wicked."*

You can't generate peace if you're out of relationship with God. As long as self is at the center, as long as our feelings and prestige and rights are our chief concern, there will never be peace.

Unity Requires Humility

The bond of peace is the glue that holds God's people together. It's the bond that Paul described in Philippians 2:2-3.

...fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

That's hard to do when you think you're the best that's ever been. Humility isn't about not thinking a lot about yourself, it's not thinking about yourself at all.

The Apostle James wrote in chapter 4 verse 1 of his Epistle:

Where do wars and fights *come* from among you? Do *they* not *come* from your *desires for* pleasure that war in your members?

James concludes that the major reason for war on the outside is war on the inside. You can't be at peace with others if you're not at peace with yourself or with God.

Walking Worthy in Unity

We're called to walk in humility which gives birth to gentleness. Gentleness gives birth to patience. Patience gives birth to forbearing love, and all four of these characteristics contribute to keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. That's why God saved us—to bring us together as one body.

The virtues of Jesus Christ and the unity of the Holy Spirit stand in such contrast to the attitudes and the division of the world. The world's a mess, and a lot of churches are just as messed up. Some of the worst fighting I have ever seen have been in annual business meetings where it was like Armageddon with people yelling and screaming.

The Importance of Unity in Church Growth

There is no program that we as a church can institute that can open the door to the gospel the way that individual believers can when they are genuinely humble, meek, patient, forbearing in love, and demonstrating peaceful unity in the Holy Spirit.

We're praying. We want to grow our church, but there's nothing that we can do if we're not walking worthy in Christ. As good as our works may be, they won't make the difference. It's what's going on inside of us that will draw people.

Genuine humility, meekness, lowliness, patience, forbearing in love, and that peaceful unity in the Holy Spirit is so attractive to a lost world, fragmented homes, and broken lives.

Those qualities of lowliness, gentleness, and forbearance demonstrate authentic Christianity. It becomes a beacon of light to those who live in a divided and darkened world. Our oneness is our witness.

It's not what is going on around us. It's what's going on inside of us that will make the difference in people's lives.

7 Realities that Unite Us

In verses 3-6 of our text, Paul names seven spiritual realities that unite all true believers.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

These seven truths are the foundation upon which we build our commitment to live as one. Let's break them down.

One Body

One body. The church is the body of Christ. It consists of people who, throughout time, have accepted God's offer of redemption, regardless of religious denomination. A funny thing about Jesus, when he comes into your heart, He brings all of his friends with him.

Do you belong to Jesus? Well, then, if you belong to Jesus, they belong to you too.

One Spirit

According to Ephesians 2:21, our individual temples of the Holy Spirit are collectively being fitted together and growing into a holy temple in the Lord. Verse 22 goes on to say that we are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Individually, I'm a temple of the Holy Spirit, but collectively, God is fitting us all together as a dwelling place for him.

As God's family, we need to get along with the other members of the body. If there is a problem between you and another member, fix it because there is so much at stake.

One Hope

Believers are also unified in the one hope of their calling. Our calling to salvation is ultimately a calling to Christlike eternal perfection and glory. One day we're going to be perfect.

In Christ, we have different gifts, different ministries, different areas of service. But the bottom line is that every believer in the body of Christ has the same one calling. We are called to be holy and blameless before Him. Paul mentions it in Ephesians 1:4. He says:

...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

Also Romans 8:29 says:

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

We will be conformed to the image of his Son when we see the glorified Christ. He's coming for every true believer, and all of us will be called up together.

One Lord

It's difficult to believe that two believers can claim to obey the same Lord and yet not be able to walk together in unity.

When something is torn, you mend it. Jesus found Peter and his brother and another couple of disciples mending their nets. Why were they mending them? Because the next day's fishing trip was dependent upon having strong nets. You don't want to have shoddy nets that are full of holes because the fish will escape.

The church is called to be fishers of men. To do that, we need a strong net created by walking in unity together. Romans 10:12 says:

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

God has called us, and the Holy Spirit wants to use us to make a difference in the world—to bring people and homes together, and bring people to Christ.

Acknowledging the Lordship of Christ is a giant step toward spiritual unity and agreement among God's people.

One Faith

There is one faith in true Christianity—one settled body of truth deposited by Jesus Christ into his church. It's the foundation of what we believe. Jude verse 3 says:

Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

The early church recognized a body of basic doctrine that they taught, guarded, and committed to others.

Is what we believe really important? Yes, because what you believe will determine how you behave. The fundamentals of our faith in the scriptures provide guidelines for our behavior.

One Baptism

Baptism was extremely important in the early church. Not as a means of salvation or even a special blessing, but as a testimony of identifying with and having unity in Jesus Christ. Those who, by one Lord and in one faith testify to that unity in one baptism.

One God and Father

Paul likes to emphasize God as father. The marvelous oneness of believers in the family of God is just so evident here. We are children in the same family, so we ought to be able to walk together in unity because we have the same papa.

There is no greater testimony to a lost world than when they see the family of God loving and caring about each other. When we have a reputation in the community. When people say, you know, those folks over there are so unified, and they rally to one another.

If the Church can just do that even in a greater way imagine the impact we can have.