

33 - the Unity of the Church of Christ

by Ben Torrey

The call to unity in the church is a call to live in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called, with humility, gentleness, patience, and love, and to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

Duration: 10:11

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

Topics: "Unity"

Description

In this sermon, Ben Torrey discusses the importance of unity within the body of Christ. He emphasizes that unity is a gift from God but can easily be lost if not guarded. The key to maintaining unity is through peace among believers, and any disturbance of this peace, such as jealousy or sin, can lead to a loss of unity. Torrey highlights the calling of believers to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and love, and emphasizes that unity is preserved through the bond of peace. He also addresses the issue of position within the church, urging believers to focus on their place in God rather than seeking personal status.

Transcript

Hello, this is Ben Torrey back again to share more thoughts on the subject of unity, specifically unity within the body of Christ, unity within His Church. I trust that you have been both challenged and encouraged by the things I've been sharing. I know that these meditations on what Christ requires of us have certainly been a challenge to me.

Tonight I would like to look at a passage in Ephesians chapter 4, verses 1 to 6. Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. While not quite as passionate as Philipians 2 that we looked at last week, this passage still does contain a sense of Paul's heart on the subject.

Invoking his status as a prisoner, he implores the Ephesian church. He reminds them where these words come from, from someone who is making the fullest sacrifice for them, and he pulls at their heartstrings. So what is it that he is imploring them? To unity, of course.

He uses some of the same terms that we saw last week, words like humility and one another. However, rather than tie this to their love for him, rather than being quite so personal, he steps back a bit and places the emphasis on them and their place in God. He calls them, he implores them to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.

In Philippians, Paul was making an appeal for unity a very personal appeal. Here, he ties it to every Christian and to that to which we have been called. We have been called to be Christ in the world as members of his body.

We have been called to proclaim salvation to the lost. We have been called to love one another. We have been called as servants of God.

This is a mighty and great calling, and it requires of us that we walk in a certain manner, that we live in a certain way. His call is very practical. Humility and gentleness, patience, tolerance for one another, love, and with a special emphasis that we be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

That word diligence implies constant effort. It is not effort to attain unity, but to preserve unity. We see all around us in the church a lack of unity.

Paul sees that God has given us unity and that it is our job to work hard to preserve it. Clearly, unity is a gift of God, but it can be easily lost if we are not careful. And what keeps us unified? A bond, something that ties us together.

And what bond? Peace. Peace among us keeps us together. If we let something disturb this peace, like jealousy, greed, self-righteousness, in other words, sin, if we let these things come in, we lose the peace and we lose the unity.

As he goes on, he lists the things that are part of this calling and which provide us a source, a framework, and a means to this unity. In verses four and five, we read, there is one body and one spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We are part of the body of Christ. That body is one. We are filled with the spirit of God.

That spirit is one. We were called to one hope, salvation in Christ Jesus. We do not have several hopes.

There's only one hope because there is only one Lord. We do not hope in Buddha. We do not hope in Allah.

We do not hope in keeping the Torah, the law of Israel. We do not hope in our ancestors. No, we have only one hope, and that is in Christ Jesus.

Even as there is only one Lord, there is only one faith in that Lord. Paul continues, there is one baptism. Under the Old Testament law, there were many baptisms or washings.

In the earliest days of the church, some people thought that you needed to be baptized again after committing serious sin. Paul deals elsewhere with the problem of being baptized by different people, and so thinking that you had to follow these different people. No, there is only one baptism, and it is that baptism that brings us into the one body of Christ.

Finally, he says, there is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. God is one. The ancient cry repeated by Jesus himself rings out, Sh'ma Yisrael! Hear, O Israel! The Lord thy God is one, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind.

God is one. There is one God that we are to love. How can we not be one and love him? This is the crux.

John tells us in his first epistle, chapter 4, verse 20. If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

To claim to love God while not loving our brother, while not being diligent to preserve unity in the bond of peace which he gives, and for which Christ died, to claim to love God while not being one with each other, this is a slap in the face of God. It is a lie. It is a rejection of what Christ did for us.

It is to take the name of the Lord in vain. Let us go back for a moment to Paul's exhortation to be diligent to preserve the unity. God gives us unity when we become one with him, when we are baptized into him.

So why do we lose it? There are many reasons, but one very practical one that seemed to have been a regular problem in the New Testament church, and which Paul deals with in the verses that follow, is the problem of position in the church. I think we're still struggling with that one. Paul enumerates a list of offices within the church which he calls God's gift to the church.

Let's look at verses 11 and 12 of Ephesians 4. And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. These are all gifts of God to his church, his saints, that we be built up to do the work of service to which he has called his body.

I think it's interesting that in this list pastor comes after evangelist. It looks like in Paul's rank above the moksha. Yet even that comment betrays our wrong attitude towards these things.

It is this very attitude which destroys unity. We are so jealous of each other's office, of each other's gifts, of each other's position. Time and again Paul has to spell out that because one person is a pastor, and another is an evangelist, because one is a prophet, and another a healer, because one is an administrator, and another a helper, none of these set us above one another.

In a later program I plan to talk about how all the different gifts, all the different offices relate to each other. But for now it is enough to note that they all serve one purpose, and that purpose is a purpose towards unity. In Paul's church there is no separation between lay people and clergy.

All are clergy, just different kinds of clergy. Jealousy seems to be one of the worst things for destroying unity. There is jealousy for different positions or offices.

There is also jealousy for different people. One thing that I have seen is people following this pastor or that pastor. Pastors are jealous that someone will take their people away, and the people are jealous that someone else will be more important than their pastor.

Paul had to deal with this in Corinth, where some said they followed Apollos, and some said Paul, or Peter, or just Christ. Jealousy is as old as the church, and it is still tearing us apart. As we end this time

tonight, I call you to remember that you are called to unity.

You are born into it through baptism, and you must work hard to preserve it. Think of all the things that destroy that unity, especially jealousy. Don't let these things work in you.

Good night.

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