

Church Unity: Its Ground and Its Nature, p.3

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Let's go back to Ephesians 4 for a brief installment. I'll not be long but, once again, I think this text fits aptly with where we are in this meeting tonight and why we do what we do here at Grace Life Church.

Again, Paul writing to the local church at Ephesus has come to his practical application section and the first thing he exhorts the church there about is unity, and we have made a really big deal and I can't make too big of a deal out of the priority of unity but also the uniqueness of unity. The unity of God's church is radically unlike any other unity, any other collectivity, group, organization in the world can have. It's radically, wonderfully, supernaturally unique and it is of God. It's beyond our capacity to put it under a microscope and examine it or test it. It's something that you experience by the supernatural, you might even say mystical work of the Spirit of God in all of our individual hearts, and that causes us to come together in unity.

Here's how he says it in chapter 4, verse 1. We will go down through verse 6 again.

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is

Again, the two words "There is" is not in the original Greek. That's what it's in italics in the New American Standard. So you just start verse 4 with,

one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

It's as if the apostle couldn't say enough about the greatness of all the divine aspects that make us this unique, powerful, one group or in unity.

Now I want to talk about "one Lord." We've already talked quite a bit about that we are one body. It is God's Gospel and God's Holy Spirit that has transformed us and made us

all into one body. Now, you may be a member of a number of neat and special things in this world and I'm not saying those are wrong, but they are at the best secondary to what God has made you a part of. Do you get that? God made you a part of the local church. God made you one with your brothers and sisters in Christ and we are one body together.

Now secondly, not only that he said we are of one Spirit. The same Holy Spirit that worked in your heart, worked in your heart, and your heart, and your heart, and my heart. He did it and he is one. He changed us and changed us to all the same way. The old-timers used to use the word "religious affections." He changed the affections of our heart. Now the old affections still linger around because you're still in the old flesh package, you're still in the old sinful body, if you will, so there are those old pulls but something new has been put in you and you are having new affections. There is a new love for the Scriptures, a new love for sound doctrine, a new love for other believers, a new love for the means of grace like preaching the word, a new love for church ordinances, you're starting to see new things in the baptistery and new things at the Lord's table, it just means more to you, and as you grow in sanctification, those affections grow. It's the Spirit that does that and he gave that to all of us who are all in that journey together.

So one body, one Spirit, and then we come to the third thing, we talked about that this morning, one hope, and he combines that with your calling, that God has called you, you are one of his called out ones which was evidenced by your repentance and faith. There is a human responsibility side to this divine equation, but nevertheless the God who knew you and predestined you, called you, Romans 8:20-30, and he called you the same as he called everyone else who knows Christ as Savior and Lord. He made us to be one. We have this one hope that we were given because he called us to be his own. We have the hope of justification, the hope of sanctification, the hope of glorification, hope of eternal life together one day, and so that makes us uniquely one.

Now we come to the fourth thing and I want to pick this up, if you will, in verse 5, the first two words: one Lord. Now that makes us peculiar and unique and one because we have all communed together in agreement that we have pledged absolute, full, sole allegiance to one Lord. Your Lord is not different than her Lord, and hers is not different than his, and his is not different than hers. All of us have pledged allegiance to the same Lord and I want this to do what it has done for me as I have thought about it, and that is unintentionally, if you don't think on it, you diminish that you and I are under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He is Lord.

Now, the concept of Lord in the day in which Paul was writing this is quite different from our concept today. Lordship or him being our Lord, has the idea of both possession and authority. It's not just authority. For example, we have a dear police officer that helps us every service. We're going to talk about security in just a few moments and some things we want you to be aware of and help us with. But that police officer has a uniform and he has a badge and he has authority and Christians ought to always honor the authority of law enforcement officers. Can I get an amen there? Respect. Never should you call a police officer by any slang term. It should be, "Yes, sir and, no, sir. Or yes, ma'am, no, ma'am." Whatever it is. Honor that authority, but Christ's Lordship is different than just

having authority. He not only has authority, he has all authority over us and he not only has all authority, he possesses us. He owns us. We are his. He is both owner and sovereign over our lives.

When we were in India speaking with a group of church planters and they were letting some of the men introduce themselves and share a little bit about their journey to faith in Christ, as you know, India is certainly not a predominantly Christian culture. This man stood up and just didn't talk like this was anything unique or special but he said, "I grew up in a Muslim family, in a Muslim neighborhood, and when I was small, my father incurred some debts he could not pay so my father gave me as a slave to another man and I had to serve his household as a slave for X number of years until I paid the debt by my indentured service." Then he just went on to his call, his coming to faith in Christ, his call into the ministry. Boy, it hit me like, "Did I just hear that?" I didn't think that existed in the world anywhere. I wonder if anybody is talking about that there are sections or sects of the Muslim faith that are still actively practicing slavery today because this guy wasn't that old, this wasn't that many years ago, and he would understand what this means. That's exactly what this means when Jesus is Lord. He owns us. We are his possession. He is our sovereign. He has all authority over him.

Now when you went to the baptismal waters – listen to me now – you were not just saying, "Jesus has washed my sin away," you were saying that but equally so you were saying, "And I publicly pledge absolute subservience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ." That's what baptism means. It's an awesome and holy and very meaningful ordinance. It's the public profession that you are now Christ's. He has cleansed you but he is your Lord. And by the way, how do we do that? We don't grit our teeth and try to say we are going to do the best we can at this. No, something has changed in our hearts whereby we have new affections and we desire his Lordship. We may wrestle with it at times, we may struggle with it at times, and we certainly fail in honoring his Lordship at times, but there is something different in us that the world doesn't have that causes us to want to honor his Lordship.

Of all things, I was looking at some things on social media, more of the political realm, and they had a little video on there of a homosexual who owned a coffee shop and he was forbidding Christians who had been handing out pro-life literature, I think that was the context, he was forbidding them from having coffee in his coffee shop. He said, "I'm offended by this literature and what you're doing." And in his tirade against the professing Christians who were there, he said, "If Jesus were here," and with the crudest of language, he said, "I'd have sex with Jesus." Just the most vile, crude wickedness being vomited up out of his black black heart, and I thought how radically different that is from what's in my heart. I may fail my Lord but I don't want to fail my Lord.

I'll never forget the first time I heard this and I've said it to you many many times, is really the centerpiece of heaven is that I will finally serve my Lord perfectly. I'll finally serve him perfectly. It's in my heart to but I feel like Paul in Romans 7, and I'm convinced Paul was talking about his converted struggles, this wasn't a glimpse of his life before conversion, and he wraps up his struggle as he is talking about his own walk and

his battling with the flesh and the law and wanting to do right and then failing, and then he ends it all up by saying, "Wretched man that I am. Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" In other words, "As long as I am housed in this sin package, this fallen flesh packaging, I keep wrestling and struggling and failing." But what was Paul saying? "But I so desire his Lordship." Brothers and sisters, in this church in our lives in the totality of what we are, we have committed ourselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Here's one way to say it: our reason is subject to his teaching; our conscience is subject to his commands; and our hearts and lives are subject to his control. Our reason is subject to his teaching. Our conscience is subject to his commands. And our hearts and lives are subject to his control. We are his slaves, but think about it: you bow before and pledge full subservience and obedience to one who would hang on a cross, become your filth and take the blow of wrath in your place. What a Master we serve. No wonder he said, "Take my yoke upon you. My burden is light." Now, these people, they knew what slavery meant, they knew what being owned meant, and Jesus said, "Yes, you are fully a bondsman to me if I'm your Savior. I'm also your Lord, but my load is easy and my burden is light."

So this Lordship of Christ, this slavery to him, this is our liberty because we are submitting to one who is of infinite wisdom, one who has infinite knowledge – now listen – one who is of ultimate goodness and supreme unfathomable love. That's who we are enslaved to. That's the one we are in bondage to. 1 Corinthians 6:20, "For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Romans 14:9, "For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." And we are under his Lordship. His sovereignty over us extends beyond the body even to the soul, and the union with him is unspeakably more intimate than any earthly lordship that man may know or man can know.

So we have this unity. All of us have pledged ourselves to unwavering subservience to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. You know, that just settles a lot of issues, doesn't it? That just solves a lot of things right there, the Lordship of Christ. I just quickly jotted down some thoughts.

Church, individual brother and sister in Christ, he is Lord of your social life. He is Lord of your social media life. He is Lord.

He is Lord of your morality or your immorality. He defines for you what your sexual expression can be and cannot be. He defines for you what marriage is and what marriage is not. He has defined for you whether you are male gendered or female gendered and you are only one of the two, period, because he is Lord.

Do you see how this just fixes everything? It just makes everything so clear and so easy. We just live in a post-Christian era in America where we have thrown out the law of God and the dictates of God, now every man does what is right in his own eyes, and I guess we are waiting for some professor at Berkeley in California to tell us what the new right and wrong is, and that's always changing because people come up with some weird idea.

So we are living under now what you would call subjective law, it's just whatever subjectively feels best. Folks, we've got a large group in this country today who no longer want to fix America. They thought we were really on a good path and we were really going to replace America with their new socialist, progressive concepts, which again, are ever-changing. But if you have enough people in a country that are purposing to honor the Lordship of Christ that things get really easy.

He is Lord of our social life, he is Lord of our moral life, he is Lord of our work life. Sir, if you are an employer, ma'am, if you are an employer, you don't get to treat your employees the way you think best, you treat them the way he says to treat them. He is Lord. Sir, if you work for a man, even if a man does not do you right and doesn't treat you right all the time, the Bible says you honor him anyway because he is lord of your work life. Can I get an amen? You are to work for your employer like working under the Lord because he is your lord. You don't have to figure it out, you don't have to call the union boss, you open this book and say, "Jesus is Lord." I can tell you, I have heard testimony after testimony after testimony of people in our church who honored their employer with this kind of spirit and in every case God exalted them in the company. I've never seen God not honor that spirit. That's what Daniel had with the king in Babylon. He honored him the best he could without sinning and God exalted him.

He's Lord of our social life, he is Lord of our moral life, he is Lord of our work life, he is Lord of our time. He is Lord of our time. Somebody said, "I don't come to church on Sunday, that's the only free day I've got." Who told you that? Who told you you were free on that day? The church that God by his Gospel and the work of his Spirit has called you to be a part of, meets on that day. That's been settled. Your Lord settled that. Isn't this easy? It just makes everything easy. He is the Lord of your time.

Now, do you remember me saying this? I found out on a number of things I was more conservative than God. You know, as a young preacher, "Bless God, we're going to..." And then I had to recognize that I was stomping my foot and turning red in the face and standing on some things that the Bible wasn't clear on. So I had to say, if he's Lord, then I need to be more liberal on that point. Amen? Lordship means there might be some things where you've gotten out of whack. Some of you moms, you're just borderline homeschool Nazis, church integrated Nazis, and you need to back up and say, "Wait a second, I don't have enough Scripture to form hard lines here so I'm going to back off on my dogmatism there." I've had to do that, you have to do that. Do you know why? Because he is Lord. I'm not Lord, you're not Lord, he is Lord.

He is Lord of your talents. If you use them, the way you use them, how often you use them. He is Lord.

He is Lord of family life. Children should submit to their parents because Jesus is Lord. It's just that simple. We need a little of this every now and then, don't we? Wives should honor their husbands because Jesus is Lord. The husband should treat his wife in an understanding way because Jesus is Lord. "Yeah, but..." Ain't no, "Yeah, but..." I'll tell

you what the "but" is, Jesus is Lord. That's the, "Yeah, but..." you need to be concerned about.

He is Lord of our friendships. You don't get to just run around with anybody you want to. Now look, the Bible gives us the balance that we live in a fallen world and you'll have acquaintances, you may have work associates and situations where a guy or a lady is just crude and vulgar and you don't like it, but you have to live in the world, Paul said. We can't go out of the world. We have some of those associates. But those people you choose to run with need to be people that help you honor Christ. I've told you many times, you let Jesus pick your friends. You just talk real about Christ and real about your love for the Scriptures and be real with them about your love for the church and real of how you are trying to be a repentor and honor Christ's Lordship, and you'll find out, God will bring the right friends in and he will push the wrong ones out. You don't have the friends you want, you have the friends your Lord wants you to have. He is Lord of our friendships.

He is Lord of our free time. He is Lord of our thoughts. There is nowhere he doesn't get into. You know, the expression "let Jesus into your heart," I don't use that expression because I don't think it's evil but I don't think it is as sound as I would like it to be. First of all, why does Jesus want to get into your rotten filthy heart for? He doesn't want to get in there. He doesn't want to get in your heart. He wants to give you a new heart. He wants to give you a heart transplant, that's what he wants. But anyway, when we talk about, we use "let Jesus into your heart," sometimes we take stuff and we put it back in the closet and then back in the closet and there is another little cabinet and we go way back there and we put something back in there. Jesus is Lord is back in there too.

Even of your thoughts. You know, the Bible tells you you can't think on certain thoughts. If you find yourself thinking certain ways, the Bible tells you you are to capture that thought and repent of it. "Pastor, I'm depressed and I'm confused and I have anxiety." Stop it! Quit it! Stop it now! Stop it tonight! Just don't do it! Is that clear enough?

He is Lord of our thought life. I want to say that strong because some of you think you're the victim of your thinking and the Bible says you don't have to be. And a lot of our stress and depression and anxiety, by the way, I walked this path and still struggle here, okay? I'm not speaking to you as one who has arrived but one who is on the journey, and we have to humble ourselves and reclaim authority over our thinking. "Well, I just really think..." It doesn't matter what you really think. You're not Lord of your thoughts, he is. Does the Bible say that thinking is true? The Bible commands us in Philippians 4 to think on things that are true. If you're thinking up, ladies, you're thinking up 1,001 scenarios where the world is coming to an end next week, then that's not true. You don't know that so you have to capture that thought, repent of it because Jesus is Lord and he said stop thinking that way. Fix all of your psychological problems in about 10 minutes, just let Jesus be Lord.

Remember my story with Jay Adams? Do you remember that story? How many of you remember that story of Jay Adams? I was depressed, I was discouraged, I had no physical strength, we were going through terrible warfare here at the church and I called Dr. Jay

Adams, the king of nouthetic counseling or biblical counseling, and said, "Dr. Adams, I'm at the end of my rope. I don't know what I'm going to do. It's Wednesday night. I can't go and preach. I'm just done." He said, "What did God call you to do?" I said, "Preach." He said, "You go out there and preach and throw yourself into it." I said, "Huh?" He just point blank told me the truth. That was the truth. Helped me phenomenally just to hear a strong clear word of truth. "God told you to preach, didn't he? Well, you go and preach." You don't submit to your feelings, you submit to God's truth. Well, that was just a reference point in my own life that I have had to revisit many times as I have wallowed in self-pity in difficult situations and had to recognize again that I'm just not allowed to think what I want to think. I am to think what God says to think.

He is Lord of your free time. He is Lord of your friendships. He is Lord of your families, Lord of your talents. He is Lord of your time. He is Lord of your work life. He is Lord of your moral life. He is Lord of your social life. He is Lord of your feelings, and we won't cover that because we really did that in thoughts, but you don't just get to feel the way you want to feel. "Well, but I feel like..." Who cares? It just doesn't matter. The last thing we need is a lot of sissy effeminate men going, "Well, I don't feel this and I don't feel that." Be a man. We are to function on principles and truth, not our little whiny feelings all the time. And by the way, I get to pastor a lot of men who are manly men and that's a blessing because they are just like rocks. They don't let their hearts get all over the place but they help me and they stay right on the book and that is such a blessing.

He is Lord of your convictions. Someone said one time, "Well, you know, my conscience just..." I don't care what your conscience feels. What does the word say? Inform your conscience by the word. Now, if your conscience is informed by truth, that's one thing, but if you are just going by what you subjectively feel. Do you see how this makes us all one? Because when you're feelings are different than hers and her feelings are different than his, and if that has a conflict, then you have different feelings and you'll be in conflict, but let's say you have these deep feelings about something and it starts causing a conflict, then you just go to the Lordship of Christ and you say, "Now, what does the book say? And that's what the Lord wants and we'll just all agree to get our feelings in line with the book." Your feelings are not Lord, Jesus is Lord. Now, I'm not saying we ever arrive here but I'm saying we all should all be in the fight.

He is Lord. He is Lord of our convictions. I don't get to have my convictions. "Well, I've got a conviction about that." Well, is it biblical? And if it isn't biblical and you have a conviction, that may be okay but you can't enforce it on anyone else. You can't enforce it on anyone else. That's your personal conviction. You even rejoice in the brother or sister who has a contrary conviction because the Bible says it is something that you can't have an objective or a subjective opinion to force on someone else. It might be going to the movie theater or wearing certain kind of clothes or 1,001 different things.

He is Lord of our plans. What are we going to do? What are we going to do? He is Lord of all of these things.

Now, look, I know the Scripture doesn't speak specifically to a lot of things, we just have to live our lives and be yielded to God and let him kind of guide us down the road, but at the end of the day, what is a powerful aspect of our unique peculiar unity we have as a church? That is that we are a people that from the top of our head to the tip of our toes says humbly and sincerely, "Jesus is Lord." That's what makes us all one. So that's why Paul says here of all the other things, also we have one Lord and that makes us one. As a matter of fact, if we all are tuned into one Lord, we are always going to be one together.