

## The Glory of Christ in the Unity of His Church, Part 2

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on January 15, 2012

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John 17:1 *Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son ...<sup>5</sup> "Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.*

...<sup>10</sup> *and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them.*<sup>11</sup> *"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are.* [He's praying for the unity of those who follow Him, that they would experience the same unity enjoyed within the Trinity!]

...<sup>20</sup> *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;<sup>21</sup> that they may all be one; even 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 sent Me.*<sup>22</sup> *"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; [that's an amazing statement; not only does our unity glorify Christ, but the glory the Father gives to His Son, He shares with us also! And he shares that glory so that we can share the unity that the Father shares with the Son as well! So our unity gives Christ glory and His glory also gives us unity!!]*

<sup>23</sup> *I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.* [that's a lot at stake in church unity, so the world knows Jesus is from God and that God loves us as much as He loves Jesus]<sup>24</sup> *"Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory...*

Jesus taught on that night that the Spirit gives glory to Christ (Jn 16:14), the Father gives glory to Christ (John 17:1) and gives glory to us (17:14) so we can be more unified and Christ more glorified. To adapt a phrase from John Piper: *Christ is most glorified in us when we're most satisfied in Him and most unified with His body.*

Now turn to Ephesians 4, where we'll see the same points. Title of this message: The Glory of Christ in the Unity of His Church, Pt 2.

Eph. 3:21 *to Him be the glory in the church ... [4:3 explains how]<sup>3</sup> being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*<sup>4</sup> *There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism,<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.* [same things Jesus in that upper room]

The obvious key word is one and obvious emphasis is our oneness. The same things Jesus talked about that night when His hour had come to go the cross for His church to give Himself up for her (Eph 5:25) are the things Paul talks about for the unity of the church and glory of Christ:

- glory, 3:21 is what Jesus prayed to the Father for in Jn 17
- in 4:3 the *Spirit's* unity and peace Christ prayed for in Jn 17
- the word *one* repeated many times in 4:4-6 is also in Jn 17

-v. 4, the *body, Spirit, calling*, Jesus also spoke of that night (John 13-17)  
 -in v. 5-6, the *one Lord Jesus, one faith, one baptism, one God the Father*...all those things the Lord also taught there and were part of what He died for, to be part of us.

Rom 15:7 “*Therefore accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.*”  
 And this brings us back to the overarching motive: the glory of our Lord in the unity of His body.

Paul moves from the glory of God (Eph 3:21) to the urgency of our unity in Eph 4:1: “*I urge you as a prisoner ...*” There is an urgency in this word, as Paul writes as a dying man to dying men this book, as a man awaiting execution by Rome possibly soon, he wasn’t sure. He was bound as a prisoner as he says in Eph 4:1, but then in v. 3 he speaks of *the bond of peace*.

We can think of v.4-6 as seven links in a chain binding us together. Just as Paul was literally bound inseparably to that soldier in that house, we are spiritually bound inseparably to Christian soldiers in God’s house. This *bond of peace* links believers in Christ together. “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love ...” The tie is a spiritual union, a Spirit-produced bond, v. 3 *unity of the Spirit*.

In this bond, v. 3 says we must be *diligent to preserve unity* (NAS).

NKJV: *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit ...*

NIV: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit ...*

Amplified: *strive earnestly to guard...the harmony and oneness*

Another: *doing your best to safeguard ...* (Wuest’s NT)

ESV: *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*

The first thing that stands out in those different translations I read is that this takes hard work...because we’re hard people to be with: *eager to, endeavoring to, diligent to, doing your best, make every effort, strive earnestly* – this is a labor of love...it’s a labor in love.

The context is clearly the body of Christ (next phrase in v. 4) and the people who have the Spirit. In all those different translations, it’s clear that we don’t *create* unity; we are to *keep* the unity that the Spirit of God has created in putting us in His body (v. 3-4). We are to *preserve, maintain, guard/safeguard* this gift (church unity), not for the sake of a Rodney-King-sort-of-theology (“can’t we all just get along?”) but for the sake of the glory of King Jesus (3:21)! My family grew up in fundamentalist Baptist circles, and my dad wasn’t this way, but some in those circles were “fightin’ fundies”:

- Some seemed to make the King James translation a more important issue and focus than King Jesus Himself. One supporting church of our family actually dropped support for us as missionaries, largely for us not being KJV-onlyists as dad sometimes quotes verses not in Elizabethan English
- For others in those circles they were strict separationists of any Christian leader associating with “neo-evangelicals” (basically anyone not super-duper-fundies like them)
- For others in those circles, the litmus test of orthodoxy or who to have unity with is those who believe all the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible, from the gap theory in Genesis through 7 dispensations to pre-trib rapture to the end of Revelation singing “my hope is built on nothing less than Scofield’s Notes and Moody Press”!

- Or maybe the unity of others was for those who didn't go to movies or play with playing cards or who didn't dance, drink, smoke, or chew, or ever hang out with those who do

Now, it's ok to have conservative standards for you and your home and it's ok to like particular Study Bibles or particular translations of the Bible, it's ok to homeschool your children, or get rid of your R-rated movies, cable TV, not drink alcohol...that's kind of me but not because I think any of those are the 11<sup>th</sup> commandment though and not to elevate those things over the things of Ephesians 4 and not to keep me from uniting with others who aren't a clone of me.

It's ok to say *as for me and my house, we serve the Lord...this way*. But it's not ok to say I'm better than others or to insist every other household must be like mine, or to wear those like Pharisee tassles. I can have convictions, even strong ones, and not be a crusader for those things trying to conquer the world to them. I can make hard decisions on secondary or even core issues without being unnecessarily hardcore in how I relate to Christians. And I also need to share unity with Christians who may not share the same rules as me but who share the same realities of Eph 4:4-6, these are the 7 links in the chain that bonds us together, the same:

1. One Body – v. 4, doctrine of church (ecclesiology)
2. One Spirit – doctrine of Holy Spirit (pneumatology)
3. One Hope – doctrine of future things (eschatology)
4. One Lord – doctrine of Christ as Lord (Christology)
5. One Faith – Bibliology (faith comes by hearing the Word)
6. One Baptism – affects Ecclesiology/Soteriology (salvation)
7. One God and Father – Theology Proper (doctrine of God)

The number 7 in Scripture is often the number of perfection or completeness, so in giving us these 7 links in the chain that binds us together, the idea may be a sevenfold perfect complete unity.

### 1<sup>st</sup> link: We're One Body

How do we know who's in this body and what it is? Back in Eph 1, Paul prays in v. 19 that we would know God's power at work in us who believe, then in 1:22: "*He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him [Christ] as head over all things to the church,*<sup>23</sup> *which is His body* ... [the church is the body of Christ, those who believe in Christ, who have Christ as their head, which means Christ is their authority and they submit under His feet]

If Christ is not your head, your authority, if your life isn't under Him in submission, if you don't bow and believe, you're not part of the *one body*, in living union with the Head and rest of the body. Some people in local churches are part of the true body of Christ, some are not, based on their relationship to Christ, the body's head. This is the doctrine of the universal church: there is one body of Christ that transcends earthly buildings, boundaries, and barriers. If you look at Eph 2:8-9 it says we're saved by grace through faith in Christ, and Eph 2:16 says Christ came for all, Jew/Gentile, etc., to: "*reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*" In v. 14 Paul says God made the two into one, and if God could do that with Israelis and Arabs and Jews and Gentile nations in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, then He can reconcile us with our lesser differences in our 21<sup>st</sup> century denominations.

1st link in Eph 4:4: “*one body*” ... the 2<sup>nd</sup> is like it: **ONE SPIRIT**

- Unfortunately some church’s teaching on the Holy Spirit has led to disunity (charismatics, non-), but *one Spirit* binds true believers

- Notice we don’t set aside doctrine for unity; doctrine is the basis for unity. Many say “doctrine divides”...but these doctrines *unite*.

- Notice also the Trinity is essential in this unity, God the Spirit (v. 4), God the Son (v. 5), and God the Father (v. 6). The Christian view of God as Trinity (1 God, 3 Persons) is fundamental to unity.

- Recent controversy: James MacDonald having T.D. Jakes on his program of dialogue among Christians toward unity, but Jakes, an ordained Oneness Pentecostal, has never held a Christian understanding of the Trinity (his website still uses language of a modalist heresy Christianity condemns)
- Recent controversy of professing Christian presidential candidates or others asked when about Mitt Romney, some have said Mormons aren’t Christians, Mormons are cultists
- Joel Osteen, on the other hand, on national platforms has said he believes Mormons *are* Christians, and when pressed by interviewers whether non-Christians and non-believers (Jews, Muslims, atheists) are saved, he says “I don’t know” (he recently said on Oprah that there’s many ways to Jesus)
- *I do know* that’s not the unity or “one Spirit” v. 4 is about, and teachers/groups denying a Christian understanding of the Trinity or gospel are not saved and don’t have the Spirit
- If you never talk about sin, if the message doesn’t convict, if it’s all “feel-good” ... then the *one Spirit* of Scripture is not at work in it, because the Spirit *convicts of sin* and the Spirit *makes us feel bad*, then the gospel is truly good news

For those who have experienced the one Spirit’s conviction over sin and the same Spirit’s regenerating grace, we share true unity. In 1 Cor. 12:13 Paul says “*by one Spirit... [we’re] in one body...*” and in v. 3 he said: “*No one can say Jesus is Lord except by the Spirit.*”

Which takes from the first 2 links to #3: **One hope of your calling**

This is the sovereign calling of God to salvation the Holy Spirit of God brings about. Man is responsible to repent of his sins and to confess Jesus as Lord but it’s the Spirit who convicts us of sin and no one can say Jesus is Lord without the Spirit, the Scripture says. But this calling of us began long before the Spirit helped us believe

**1:4** *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love* <sup>5</sup> *He predestined us ... [chose/predestined synonyms in NT of “called”] ...* <sup>18</sup> *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling ...*

May God open our eyes not only to His sovereign power at work in us who believe (v. 19) but also His plan at work long before we believe (v. 4-5, 11). And may that past calling give us future hope (v. 18). If you don’t believe in election or predestination, you not only have to deny Scripture, you deny yourself “*the hope of His calling.*” Understanding God’s sovereignty should give great hope, that based on His calling of us, He will finally call us to Himself. We didn’t cause our salvation and can’t keep it. God did and does!

Which takes us from before there was time ... to the “end times.”

This is another basis of unity where people aren't always united: amillennial, postmillennial, and premillennial theologians differ in their understanding of the future aspect of the hope we have in the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Jesus, in some details before and after He comes, and there are even details within each of the views to wrestle with:

- some think Christ will rapture His church right before He pours out His wrath at the end of “tribulation” (post-tribulation rapture), while others think He will rapture them 7 years before His wrath in the Great Tribulation (pre-tribulation rapture) ... at least some are going to be changing their theology mid-air!
- many Christians have bashed all others with other views on the timing of the rapture and broken fellowship over this, and I think both sides at times have been equally guilty, not in disagreeing or even debating, but in *disdaining* brethren, and in *dismissing* other Christians unnecessarily over this
- Some think Christ's final kingdom of peace will have 2-stages (pre, or postmil) others only 1 (amil). Someone has said the millenium is that time of peace Christians have been arguing about for more than a thousand years!
- I've heard each side *despise* others, name-calling 'carnal' premils, or amils as 'anti-semitic,' or postmils as 'liberal' ... be careful who and how you read and study this to preserve unity, humility, charity, as we study and pray for clarity
- There are good arguments and good people on each side, but all are on the same side in *one hope* of Christ's coming (if things look different than you or I think they will after we see Jesus again, it's ok ... if seeing Jesus is our *one hope*)

What gives all Christians unity is this one hope that Jesus is coming back. Does unity mean we abandon study of this 3<sup>rd</sup> point, sovereignty in our past calling to salvation, or in future hope aspects of prophecy? No. Is unity dependent on all agreeing on all the details or else find a church where everyone does? No. I could apply it to other areas (entertainment, education choices for our kids, extra-biblical areas where Christians differ) ... is the key to unity people who think the same, dress the same, raise their kids the same, have the same chart of prophecy on the wall, in TULIP we cross our T's and dot our I's exactly the same, and we all think the same in politics and music?

The unity Paul is talking about doesn't depend on uniformity, but it can exist among public and private-schoolers, dispensational and covenantal theologians (and others who find ourselves somewhere in-between), even Calvinists and Arminians, Republicans and Democrats, etc.

Why is that possible? If/when their hope is not in converting all to all of their points, parties, personal ideas, preferences, persuasions, views, worship style, parenting style, lifestyle, etc. If the *one hope* we share looks forward and upward, we can enjoy fellowship and relationships with Christians who are quite different...that's unity! That's the oneness Jesus was talking about that the world notices. Anybody can get along with those who agree ... unity goes deeper. Not in laying aside convictions, but in loving Christians who differ

How does it work in church? Because of the 4<sup>th</sup> point: **One Lord**

If you didn't understand some of the words in the last point, take heart if you know this one, because it's the one that matters: *Lord*. In v. 5, it's the center of these 7 truths, the centrality of the Lord Jesus holds this chain together that bind us together in unity. True Christianity if it can be condensed to 3 words is this: *Jesus is Lord*.

Augustine once said "Jesus is Lord of all or He is not Lord at all." Amazingly, even on this point some Christians have disagreed and not been united, some arguing that Christ's Lordship isn't essential to salvation. It's called non-Lordship-salvation, or easy-believism, "just believe He is Savior and you're in, and later make Him Lord"

- But we don't "make Him Lord"; *He is Lord* and Savior, and to believe in Him is to believe who He is in Scripture, not picking and choosing parts of who He is, a partial Jesus
- Thomas Brooks said the clothes of Jesus were divided at the foot of the cross, but His crown is not to be divided
- Vance Havner said "I came to Christ as a country boy. I did not understand all about the plan of salvation ... One thing I did understand even as a lad: I understood that I was under new management. I belonged to Christ and He was Lord."
- More importantly, Peter said in Acts 2 "*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*" And Paul said in Rom. 10:9 you must confess "*Jesus is Lord*" to be saved.

Do you believe in your heart, as Paul says there, *Jesus is Lord*? It's not a superficial belief, it includes submission, a new life direction:

- John 8:31 *Jesus was saying to those ... who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine;"*
- John 13:35 "*By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"
- John 15:8 "*My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.*"

Those are the people Jesus prays unity for in John 17. It's NOT that you have to do a bunch of things and then you're saved, it's that if you are saved you are willing to do all Christ calls you to because you now love Him because He first loved you, by His grace you have begun to be His disciple, continually learning. Jesus has transformed your desires so now you want to pursue what He calls you to, you are now a follower of Him, not perfectly, but there is a change of life and direction and desires—regeneration. And you have instant union with others under the same *one Lord*.

When v. 5 says there is one Lord, does that apply to people who reject what the Lord clearly says – can they claim Him rightly as their Lord? The Lord Himself said many will "say, Lord, Lord" but the Lord has never known them in a saving way, "why do you call me Lord and disregard what I say?" Paul says "examine yourself to see if you are in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5). Which leads to point #5...

## ONE FAITH

In context, this is probably faith in the Lord, in the gospel, in core truths, that Jude calls "the faith once for all delivered to the saints."

This doesn't mean we have unity with all who *profess* a Christian faith if they don't believe the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, or don't believe the Bible is the Word of God. We can't open our arms in unity to those who deny the orthodox Christian faith, the Word of God, the nature of God, heaven, hell, esp. the gospel. The unity Paul is talking about is unity in the biblical *one faith* and for those who unite around those primary and essential doctrines.

## ONE BAPTISM

At last we find a point all Christians agree on, right? I'm a baptist who believes in immersion but my Presbyterian friends think I'm all wet. Others think sprinkling or pouring is ok. Others think we should put the baby out with the baptism water. Some dip or dunk, outside, inside ... some baptize forward 3x for Father, Son, Spirit.

But one thing all Christians have in common is understanding that baptism is important as part of Christ's Great Commission. And 1 Cor. 12:13 says all are spiritually baptized, I think Romans 6 talks about the same spiritual baptism at conversion, the inner reality that the outward ritual symbolizes. That spiritual reality binds all Christians together, whenever they were baptized, even if their conscience may not bind them together in the same church, or if the leadership or membership policy may differ from one local church to another, there should be a fellowship that transcends this.

In September we had a Presbyterian brother (PCA) speak at our men's breakfast at a Baptist church [?!]. Many of the best books on my shelf are from Reformed paedobaptists who believe baptism is the sign of the covenant for children like circumcision was in the OT. But if their trust is in the gospel (they don't believe baptism saves) they are my brothers ... and in fact, I feel a closer kinship theologically in unity with them, more than many modern Baptists. R.C. Sproul and John MacArthur have modeled this (T4G, etc.).

Which brings us to the final uniting reality: **One God and Father**

John Stott puts it all together working back from v. 6: 'First, the one Father creates the one family. Secondly, the one Lord Jesus creates the one faith...and baptism [v. 5]. Thirdly, the one Spirit creates the one body [and hope, v. 4]. Indeed, we can go further. We must assert that there *can* be only one Christian family, only one Christian faith, hope and baptism, and only one Christian body, because there is only one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You can no more multiply churches than you can multiply Gods.'<sup>1</sup>

This One God in 3 Persons is the foundation of our unity in Eph. 4, v. 6 "...*Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*"

Paul used the word "one" 7x, now he uses the word "all" 4x in v.6.

- *of all* in context speaks of all believers, those who share the realities of v. 4-5, share the *one God as Father* in v. 6. God is not in a Father-child relationship to those who don't have faith in the Lord, as v. 5 says. Ephesians 2:3 says we're all children of wrath by

nature. Ephesians 1:5 says we have to be adopted into God's family. He's Father *of all* believers

- *over all* speaks of His sovereignty and supremacy
- *through all* speaks of His presence everywhere all at once
- *in all* may relate to Eph 1:23b "...*Him who fill all in all*" or end of Eph 3:19 "*to be filled up to all the fullness of God.*"

So how do we *all* keep this *oneness* and unity like v. 3 says? v. 2 says "*with all humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance in love.*"

The hymn says: We are not divided, all one body we  
 One in hope and doctrine, one in charity  
 Onward Christian soldiers marching as to war  
 With the cross of Jesus going on before

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<sup>1</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society : The Message of Ephesians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 151.