

STONE HARBOR

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Dear Readers,

What follows is one man's weekly attempt to know the truth of God's Word and bring it to His people for their good and ultimately for His glory. Please regard these only as notes belonging to a busy pastor uploaded as they stand (for better or for worse, complete or incomplete, almost always with grammatical errors, and always with room for refinement in content, structure, presentation...) to support the ongoing study of God's Word. I firmly believe that the community of faith which is the body of Christ can and should bring their gifts to bear for the good of the rest of the body and that any one teacher can be taught by the others with an understanding of the truth. Therefore, should you have insight that would sharpen any of the thinking expressed here, know that I would be pleased to receive it. Clearly, the input that is most welcome and most helpful is that which is more concise than verbose, Biblically grounded and expressed with the goal of displacing misunderstanding and apprehending the truth of God's Word. Your thoughts of that nature are most welcome, certainly appreciated and will be thoughtfully considered. You are invited to send those insights to me at johnny@stoneharborchurch.org.

In pursuit of truth and growing a shepherd's heart,

Johnny

Transformation Card

This page provides an overview of the message and resources for individual and group study.

Date: May 30, 2010
Series: The Church of God's Intention
Part: Part 1 – What God Intends the Church to Be
Section: One Church
Topic: Unity
Message Title: **God Intends the Church to be One**
Short Title: Which One?
Text: Various
Key Words:

Message Outline

The Church is One Church (Deb, use in sideways heading.)

“Which One?” (Deb, use as heading of the Outline above the two points.)

- A. How the Church is **One**
- B. How the Church is **Won**

Related Scripture

- 1. Jon 17:20-24
- 2. 1 Cor 1:10-13
- 3. Eph 4:1-5

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- 1. How have you experienced disunity in the Church?
- 2. What kind of unity does God want in His Church?
- 3. How has God brought about unity in His Church?
- 4. What is your role in preserving that unity?
- 5. Get personal. Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart. What would He have you understand about your role in any disunity you are a part of?

Memory and Meditation Verse

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” Eph 4:3 (NIV)

E. God Intends the Church to Be One

1 Cor 1:10-18

We have Catholics and Protestants. Amongst Protestants we have Baptists and several flavors of Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, and Lutherans, and Congregational churches and community churches, and Calvary Chapels and independent churches ... and that is just the churches I've attended. All this diversity yet the Bible clearly teaches the unity of the church. There is only one church according to God. It is the "church of God" the church that Jesus called "My church" the church of which Jesus is the one and only head.

The Church is one.

It may be one, but there's St John's, Living Hope, Believers International, Shoreline, Calvary, Stone Harbor, Cypress, First Pres Salinas. All on one little section of road that runs in between our two local cities.

In what sense is the church one?

3. How the Church is One

There are many references to "churches" plural in the NT. So the church is one, not in the sense that there is only one gathering of the true church in a particular place or according to a particular human definition. Rather the church is one in the sense that all the local/singular expressions of the church are really only parts of one compound whole church – the universal church, what I like to think of as **the church according to God**.

The church is not complete without all of its local expressions. When you have one church or association of churches flying under a banner defined by a man or group that declares itself the true church at the exclusion of other churches (meeting the biblical definition of the church), what you will find is a cult – a false church, **a church according to man** but not a church according to God.

Jesus said in Mat 16:18, "...I will build **My church**..." not "...I will build thousands of churches..." It is clear that Jesus' intention for the church presence was and is global. He is not looking for us 4 and no more, He is looking for His church to encompass people from "all nations" from "the remotest parts of the earth." Yet He still refers to the church as **one** church not many.

Coming from a triune God this should not surprise us. God is one, yet there exists God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit. The church is one, yet it gathers in many local assemblies.

There are many verses that indicate that the church of God is one unified body instead of many disjointed parts. The one I'd like us to focus on first is John 17:20-24. Before He endured the cross, Jesus prayed a beautiful pray in John 17 to His Father. Let's read a part of that prayer.

a) Focus Verse -- John 17:20-24

- 20 I do not ask on behalf of these alone, [referring to His disciples]
but for those also who believe in Me through their word;
- 21 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.
- 22 The glory which You have given Me I have given to them,
that they may be one,
just as We are one;
- 23 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.
- 24 Father,
I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me
where I am,
so that they may see My glory which You have given Me,
for You loved Me before the foundation of the world.

The church (the body comprised of all of Jesus' disciples through all the ages) is to be one **as Jesus is one with His Father**. Jesus prays that we, "...may all be one even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us,"

How is Jesus one with His Father? In more ways than not. In John 10:30 Jesus says, "I and the Father are one." There exists between them perfect unity, perfect knowledge of each other, perfect and intimate communion with each other, they share a relationship without flaw characterized by perfect mutual love. Jesus told Philip in John 14:9, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

According to John 17, it is the will of God the Son that we have this same unity. Thanks to the substitutionary death of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent resurrection, enthronement and sending of the His Spirit, unity is not only God's will in the sense of a potentiality, it is God's realized will – individual believers are joined to God by faith in Christ and His indwelling Spirit!

God, in Christ, **has reached** across the humanly impassable distance that separated us from Him and **has grabbed hold** of us with His strong arm and **has pulled** us to Himself across the rip current of our cultural sea bringing us into the unity of the relationship of the eternal triune God, never to be forsaken, always to be His, with Him, in Him and He in us!

That cultural rip current from which He rescued us still reaches for us like a big wave surging up the beach looking to pull us back into a chaotic sea. Peter says Satan is still prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).

Come higher up by listening carefully to God's word. Come away from the reaching waves of our chaotic culture to know God more completely and to be more sure of your union with Him even today via this message. There will be a time when God will send you back into that same dangerous current from which He has rescued you. Having prepared you, He will send you to rescue another one of His out of the rip current of that is the context of all of our lives.

The church is one in that each and every member is joined to Christ by His indwelling Spirit; as we are one with God the Son, we are one with God the Father and God the Spirit.

If you would, just bask in the warmth of this reality for a moment. God in Christ by His Spirit has rescued each of you from estrangement (and a life that was not life at all but the lie of the enemy) and has given you life -- true life, life according to God and in perfect unity with Him. Our union with God is pictured and made known to us by its likeness to the human marriage relationship in its intimacy and union, **but it is better** than any earthly relationship – it is perfect, eternal, ultimately satisfying. I pray that each of you would enjoy even relish your personal union with God.

But, although we are each individually united to God through Christ by His indwelling Spirit, when we talk about the unity of the church we are addressing not only our individual union with God but our corporate union with Him and therefore with each other. Because we are each joined to God we are joined to each other. Because we are each a part of His church, we are each a part of each other. Because each member of Christ's church is filled with Christ's Spirit, by virtue of that One Spirit who lives in each of us we are fellow members of the one body that is Christ's church.

We see this in Eph 4:4-6...

Eph 4:4 -- There is **one body** [the church] 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."

The church of God is one because there is only one God!

There are no more walls that divide people into different camps in the Church of God, if you think there are or effectively live like there are then you deny the work of Christ that Paul highlighted in Eph 2

¹¹Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands-- ¹²remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

The Church of God is "one body" comprised of people who were formerly divided into many different groupings but have now been reconciled "in one body to God through the cross." Paul speaks of Jews and Gentiles in this passage, two groups who formerly were absolutely divided from each other. According to verse 13, Christ "made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall." Paul speaks in elsewhere extending the list of formerly divided humanity that has now in Christ been made into one body, the church.

[Galatians 3:28](#) -- There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

b) This is Not Universalism

This is NOT a universalism that sees all mankind as one and equally unified with God irrespective of the form or nature of their relationship with Him. There is a popular hope that says, "God is good and He loves everyone and He just wants us all to get along and love each other. We are the world and God loves us equally no matter what we believe or how we live. So let's just accept each other and get along."

Example from Unitarian Church

While our congregations uphold [shared principles](#), individual Unitarian Universalists may discern their own beliefs about theological issues. As there is no official Unitarian Universalist creed, Unitarian Universalists are free to search for truth on many paths.

We welcome people who identify with and draw inspiration from [Atheism and Agnosticism](#), [Buddhism](#), [Christianity](#), [Humanism](#), [Judaism](#), [Paganism](#), and [other](#) religious or philosophical traditions.

<http://www.uua.org/visitors/theologicalperspectives/index.shtml>

That is not Biblical unity within the church! Rather it is human wishful thinking and actually rebellion against God who defines unity differently and who has every right to do so, especially when we consider that the church is His church. (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor 1:2; 10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13; 1 Tim 3:5)

Clearly God does not draw all men without condition into the unity of His church. His reach is global, He does not respect race, gender, social status, religious activity... but His global reach is in Christ and in Christ alone.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Mat 7:13- 27

¹³"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. ¹⁴"For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

¹⁵"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶"You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? ¹⁷"So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. ¹⁹"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰"So then, you will know them by their fruits.

²¹"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. ²²"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' ²³"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

²⁴"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵"And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶"Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷"The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell--and great was its fall."

Acts 4:12 -- "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

2 Corinthians 6:14

Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what **fellowship** has **light** with **darkness**?

No, that the church is one does not argue for universal salvation of all people, this is not universalism...

c) This is the Unity of the Spirit***(6) Focus Verse – Eph 4:3-5***

Paul calls the church in His day to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling” (4:1) by which they were called and one of the activities of that worthy walk is stated in Ephesians 4:3-5 -- ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism,

Now I'm sure this “unity of the Spirit” in Eph 4:3 is more but it is certainly not less than the union we enjoy with God right now because of the indwelling Spirit (Eph 1:11, 13-14; 1 Cor 6:19) the resurrected and enthroned Christ has given each genuine disciple of Jesus. If you have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you and I have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in me; we are both joined to God by means of that Spirit, and being so joined to Him that means that we are through Him joined to each other.

We of course are joined to each other in the local church by our interpersonal relationship we get to share due top proximity. But what of the brother in Christ who lives in China, or Tasmania whom we will never meet face to face before we die or the Lord returns? What of him or her? Are we one with them? Absolutely, we are one because we share the same Spirit, Lord and Father. Every member of the Church shares the same Spirit, Lord and Father, for there is only one God.

Paul exhorts us to diligent action to preserve the unity of the Spirit. Well what does that action look like and are we engaged in it?

4. How the Church is Won

We must keep in mind that when it comes to the things of the Spirit, human activity never leads it follows, i.e., it is never first about what we should do but always first about what Christ has already done. It is no different here.

a) The Church Has Been Won & Unified by Christ

The first point of our diligence in preserving unity in the church is simply recognizing that unity has already been secured by the work of Christ. The church is unified precisely because the members of the church have all been sealed by the One Spirit given to each member the by resurrected enthroned Christ.

Now this is not to put our heads in the sand and hide from the glaring disunity that still exists in the church; but it is to say that such disunity is either unity in progress or is counterfeit Christianity masquerading as the real thing.

As with every aspect of our spiritual lives, we can miss the reality of what Christ has done because we must grasp spiritual reality not by sight but by faith according to the Word of God. For example, we can be forgiven gifted children of God and feel like condemned depraved children of the world when we assess our spiritual condition with natural eyes.

So first we must simply be reminded and live in the awareness of the fact that Christ's work was so effective in renewing our relationship with God that we have the very Spirit of Christ dwelling in us – that makes us part of the one body of Christ.

None the less, Paul's call to diligent pursuit of unity does lead us beyond awareness of Christ's effective unifying work. We do need rightly to act as well as think rightly, and we will only act rightly when once we are thinking rightly. But having had our minds transformed, and continuing to have our minds transformed by the renewing of the Spirit we will live in that reality of unity in the church.

The love for God and man that the Spirit of God produces in the life of the believer will cause each of us to actively preserve the unity that the Spirit has established. What will this preserving activity look like? How do we participate in the winning of the unity of the church?

b) The unity of the Church is won by our lives of love that bear witness to our union with Christ and each other

Quite frankly and very sadly and perhaps because painful situations are more easily remembered than non painful situations... I can more easily recall the divisive activity in the church than the intentional unifying activity.

This should not surprise me because I'm fully aware that the church is comprised of people undergoing spiritual transformation, people who are learning to live in the reality of their new life in Christ. So it would be foolish not to expect that divisive actions can come from such people in process. Hopefully less and less, but we all from time to time act not according to the new creation that we are in Christ but according to the old nature that sees all things through the lens of self, autonomous, "it is all about me" self. Such a natural mindset wars against the unity of the body for it causes decisions to be made without regard for the rest of the body.

The calling by which we have been called is the call to love God and one another. I can offer you no better counsel in regards to your diligent preservation of the unity of the Spirit that to **let love lead!**

When you encounter a situation that is working towards disunity let love lead out your actions – love first towards God and second towards the people involved in the disunity.

Love, unity producing love, does not always look like love.

I have received words spoken to me that felt like an attack designed to produce the perceived attackers good my harm, and yet I have come over time to see those words as an expression of genuine unity producing love. Words of rebuke, reproof, correction... all can come at us feeling like attacks when they are actually expressions of love for God, His Church and for us.

Jesus words to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan...” do not sound to the natural ear like unifying words. But properly understood they are that indeed, for the death that Peter did not want Jesus to suffer was the very death out of which came the life that is our union with God. No death of Christ, no unified Church of God.

Paul's words in 1 Cor 5 also don't sound very unifying when evaluated on a short term basis. 1 Cor 5 – Regarding the man in the church who continues in blatant sin, “REMOVE THE WICKED MAN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES.” (13) But what was Paul's goal? 1 Cor 5:5 says, “I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”

2 Tim 3:16 points out the value of God's word for doing the hard work of reproof, rebuke, correction... all words that when they come to you will not be easily received as the truth spoken in love. But what is the good goal of using the word of God in this way? Verse 17 says, “so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

So words can come at us that may initially feel like words meant to tear apart the body when they are the very words we need for the good and strength of the body.

On the other hand, the crazy confusing part is that I have also received words that were presented in love language that over time I discovered had nothing to do with love and everything to do with the speakers advancement of their own agenda. You have heard the same talk, it typically comes couched in “spiritualese” employing the language of love without it's substance. It often has a similar sound to “Has the Lord really said you should not eat...?” (Gen 3:1).

And the **multiplied** crazy confusing reality is that most times the words and actions that come at us come from people undergoing spiritual transformation themselves, people who are a confusing mixture of the old man and the new man and therefore may not even know if they are really speaking words and doing deeds motivated by new-man godly love or old-man selfish ambition.

What are we to do? In regards to your words and deeds in the church, **let love lead**. In regards to the words spoken to you and the deeds done to you by other members of the church, let love lead and **walk humbly**. Pride works against the diligent unity preserving work of the saints.

One of the life lessons God is teaching me this year is that the body of Christ is comprised of spiritually gifted people who God has placed alongside me for the building up of the body, even for my own edification. Now I knew this before but am only now beginning to integrate this into my life. This means I need to receive and be built up by the word spoken to me by the one who is gifted to discern what I won't. This means I need to receive the help of the one who has the gift of helps. This means that I need to receive the gifts from the one who has the gift of giving, and the exhortation from the one so gifted... And you do to. It is in the context and the activity of the body of Christ using their gifts for each others good that we participate in the diligent preserving of the unity of the Spirit God has secured in Christ via His indwelling Spirit.

Phil 2:1-8

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