

KEEPING WITH UNITY

GBC EQUIPPING HOUR | APRIL 26, 2020



Class 3 – The Body of Unity (Ephesians 4:1-16)

PURPOSE: Local church and global church sustainability.

Introduction

In the previous classes we looked at the topic of church unity through the lens of a song and a prayer. Here we transition to a church letter which will get more into the nuts-and-bolts of church unity. Like Psalm 133 it has an easy part and a hard part. Certain aspects of unity take more time and effort to embrace than others.

I. The Easy Part (Ephesians 4:1-10)

If unity was left up to us to initiate and sustain, it wouldn't only be difficult it would be impossible. The church continually faces new threats and temptations to disband and give up. We shouldn't give up. We should realize that similar to our salvation, church unity runs on the back of what someone else has done... *and is still now doing*; in the New Testament that Someone is the powerful Triune God.

A. Unity by the Spirit

1. "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call..."

-Ephesians 4:2-4

2. Who doesn't want to be a part of a church fellowship characterized by words like "patience," "humility," and "love"? These are essential qualities for church growth and solidarity.

Concurrently, it's helpful for us not to confuse "patience" with *compromise* and "love" with *unqualified acceptance*. The Spirit doesn't compromise and the Spirit doesn't accept every line of thinking. When we realize this, such "love" ceases to be, perhaps, the cakewalk we once thought it was. But the Spirit gives us strength and conviction and with a sense of pace on how exactly to love a person in accordance with Truth.

B. Unity by the Father

1. "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all..."
-Ephesians 4:5-6
2. Just as Jesus Christ had his Father weighing in over his literal baptism and with the Holy Spirit coming to rest upon him, so also we as a corporate body of believers step into the waters of his narrative (cf. Matthew 3:16-17).

C. Unity by the Son

1. "...But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.
⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."
⁹ (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)."
-Ephesians 4:7-10
2. Jesus Christ is the central figure who unifies us especially, in the glory of his incarnation: from Heaven to Earth and back again! From a

terrestrial, looking-up perspective this is the ultimate human (and Divine) act of heroism. He humbly came down with limited fanfare. He grew up in a dusty town known only as the carpenter's son. And then he rises to the occasion to preach the Kingdom, display the Kingdom in the power of his words, and then to sacrifice his own life...for victory. The world yearns for this kind of hero. You will occasionally see knockoffs of the Original in books and movies but they pale in comparison.

II. **The Hard Part** (Ephesians 4:11-16)

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, **the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers**,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ..”

-Ephesians 4:11-12

so that we may no longer be children, **tossed to and fro** by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

-Ephesians 4:14

A. Yielding to a God-Ordained Structure

1. Today missionaries and pastors serve as ministers for the purpose of bringing the church to where it needs to be in love, Christian fellowship, and doctrinal clarity.
2. Ordained ministers are not to be venerated as if they were Popes (see Paul's use of "jars of clay" which were for very temporal usage, in 2 Cor. 4:7); neither is their office or the work of the Holy Spirit to be treated as expendable (cf. Acts 20:28).

B. Dealing with Conflict and Struggle

1. Paul's illustration of the church body likened to "children tossed to and fro with waves" is as

gripping as it is thought-provoking. Children on the verge of drowning -what a terrifying thing to watch! We can easily forget it though. Let's be honest. No church member enjoys being compared to a "child." The church after all is the "Pillar of Truth" and a "kingdom of priests." However from Paul's perspective, when factoring in the craftiness of the Devil, we had better watch out. Unity will be an uphill battle.

2. Too much structure and rules (and policy!) can overburden the church. The *organic* illustration of the church must not be lost. This not about us becoming a machine; it's about us becoming a Person: the body...unto the head...who is Christ. We do not literally become Jesus who is his own person -but it comes close. By the work of the Spirit *and structure*, people start to see Christ standing before them when the church truly comes together.

Conclusion

Being intentional and deliberate in our focus on church unity, in the coming weeks the plan is to examine how several (broadly) like-minded organizations have sought to keep a *unified church* healthy and growing across the America.

Keeping with Unity Course Outline:

- The Ascent of Unity (Psalm 133)
- The Depth of Unity (John 17:20-23)
- The Body of Unity (Ephesians 4:1-16)
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *Ligonier Ministries*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with the *Southern Baptist Convention*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *9 Marks Ministries & T4G*
- Unity Goals & Challenges with *The Gospel Coalition*