

“Unity is Our Greatest Tool!”

John 17:13-23; Ephesians 4:1-3

Intro. – Years ago a popular song was sung by such artists as the Hollies, Neil Diamond, Olivia Newton John. Written by Bob Scott and Bob Russell, the words are kind of sappy, but in reality it’s a pretty good song. In fact, I want to use its title to introduce this message: “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother”.

I use this to illustrate the fact that we who are a part of Christ’s Church all too often have been proclaiming a message of “true love” to a sin torn world, while at the same time we “bite and devour one another.” The world looking at this reasons, and rightfully so, that if God is love and the Church claims to be God’s people, then they ought to at least be on the same page with each other.

Purpose: to instill within each of us the necessity of unity on the basis of God’s Word alone

For the Church to accomplish her purpose, harmony must exist. Our greatest tool for evangelism is our unity with Christ as our Head. In no way can unity of the saints be looked upon as a *fringe benefit*; instead, it must be viewed as indispensable part of being “in Christ” and of leading others to same glorious relationship. Our texts makes this so clear and will be used for the following 3 points to accomplish this purpose:

I UNITY IS POSSIBLE

- in short, we know it is possible because unity is described!

A. Our Lord Describes Unity

1. Bearing upon His heart all members of His Church, Christ prays that they all be ONE.
2. This “oneness” described by Christ is more than an ethical or worldly idea of unity:
 - a. it is a oneness so intimate, so vital and personal that it is patterned after the relationship existing between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit
 - b. it is a oneness filled with a glorious purpose: *that the world may believe the Father sent His Son*
3. Such a request was totally within the Father’s will:
 - do you recognize from this alone that the unity of the saints is more than a fantasy?

B. Paul Describes Unity

1. Holy Spirit inspired, Paul urges you and me to “preserve the unity of the Spirit” = What mean?
2. Paul is talking about the oneness through which Holy Spirit brings us as we follow Him through His Word, the Bible – about the harmony/sameness of purpose characterized Christ’s Ch. 1st cent.
 - a. Philippians 1:27 “...stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.”
 - b. Philippians 2:2 “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.”
3. This is *the unity of the Spirit*:
 - a. it’s not something created by man; instead, it is something given by God
 - b. our responsibility is to preserve it, maintain it, protect it, and promote it.
4. Illus. – public campsite with station wagon piled high... Looked like Beverly Hillbillies on tour... Kids jumped out immediately went to work. 45 minutes campsite ready. Looked to Dad said, “Is that okay, Dad?” “It’s fine” Kids ran away as fast as they could, obviously in a hurry. Guy camping next to them asked, “How do you do that....? Father smiled, “Really it’s easy. I simply tell them no one gets to go to the restroom until we’re completely set up.” Point: Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:16, “...necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel.” I.e., unity is a powerful tool directly related to servant hood. With a servant’s heart, and committed to teamwork, Biblical unity will result in victory for Christ. Unity is possible!

II UNITY IS DESIRED

- though unity existed in early church and to certain extent exists today, doesn’t mean we have arrived:
- Illus. – preacher Smith wanted find out if people loved him... “Brother Smith departed for heaven 5:00 PM”... waited, saw someone write note: “P.S. 6 PM – heaven, Bro Smith has not arrived here yet!”

- Way it is with the church today – we’ve not arrived at the heavenly station, but the pattern is still here and Bible has the answer = unity of Spirit is what our Lord and Paul both desired:

A. Our Lord Desired Unity

1. This unity for which He prayed is not some kind of *union* – specified unity on specified basis:
 - a. it is to be personal – each of us has a responsibility in identifying and promoting unity Spirit
 - b. it is to be spiritual – oneness of mind and purpose – His purpose—not mine and not yours.
 - c. it is to be visible – address this more in the third point
2. Jesus desired ONENESS in His Church so the world would come to Him!

B. Paul Desired Unity

1. Paul concluded Ephesians 3 with a prayer (3:16-19) – *“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*
 - this is why Paul desired unity – in only such manner will praise/glory be brought to God!
2. 1 Corinthians 1:10 *“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*
 - a. Paul asks 3 ? : 1) Is Christ divided? 2) Paul crucified for you? 3) Immersed into Paul’s name?
 - b. Answer to these was “no” – obvious no one/thing deserves the *loyalty* we owe Christ!
 - c. Because of this we must do all to exalt Christ – i.e. we must be united in Spirit!

Thus, our Lord and His inspired writer made clear that their desire must become our desire = Unity...

III UNITY IS LACKING

- heart of our heritage as a church predicated on plea: “Unity of all believers on basis of Bible alone!”
- Illus. – Tonto and Lone Ranger riding through canyon when all sudden both sides filled Indiana warriors, on horses, dressed for battle. LR s turned to Tonto and asked, “What are we going to” Tonto replied, “What you mean “we” kemosobee?”
- why such lack of unity amongst each other? 2 things become clear in Ephesians 4 = how demonstrate:

A. Be Loyal in “The Faith”

1. Ephesians 4:13 *“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*
2. “The Faith” is revealed Word; therefore anytime divisiveness comes into church we’re either preaching more or less of what’s been revealed;
 - Illus. – R.C. Foster “No human being can claim a copyright on all truth. We must always be ready to hold the Scriptures and not ourselves as the divine pattern. The proposition of restoring the church of the N.T. resolves itself into 2 declarations: 1)If anything I believe or practice is not in accord with the N.T. then I want to abandon it. 2) If anything the N.T. teaches is missing from my belief and practice then I want to include it. Speak Lord, for Thy servant listens!”
3. Tragically, the lack of unity becomes most evident at this particular point:
 - a. too many lowering the Biblical standard of salvation minimizing the command for immersion into Christ – work of God and part of our acceptance of His grace.
 - b. individuals attending ecumenical institutes and seminars and using these as standards to test everything rather than using the Word of God.
 - c. More and more calling upon us to lay aside our differences... and “love” one another = unity.
 - Illus. – (Charles Spurgeon “The Essence of Separation”)“... A chorus of ecumenical voices keep harping the unity tune. What they are saying is, ‘Christians of all doctrinal shades and beliefs must come together in one visible organization, regardless... Unite, unite!’ Such teaching is false, reckless and dangerous. Truth alone must determine our alignments. Truth comes before unity. Unity without truth is hazardous. Our Lord’s prayer in John 17 must be read in its full context... Only those sanctified through the Word can be one in Christ. To teach otherwise is to betray the Gospel.”
4. We must be loyal to *the truth* in order to demonstrate God’s described and desired unity!

B. Be Loving in Spirit

1. Illus. – Mahatma Gandhi famous leader of India asked: “What’s greatest hindrance to Christianity in your country? He responded, “Christians.”
2. Paul wrote in our text, “*Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” Goes on to say (Ephesians 4:31-32) “*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*”
 - a. Illus. – what does world think when see Xtians being critical, malicious, & evil toward each...
 - b. Illus. – J.C. Ryle “*How often Xtians have wasted their strength in contending against their brethren instead of contending against sin and the devil. How repeatedly they have given occasion to the world to say, ‘When you have settled your own internal differences we will believe!’*”
3. We must not only be loyal to *the faith* but we must also be loving in spirit
 - Illus. – At mtg. of American Psychological Association, Jack Lipton, a psychologist at Union College, and R. Scott Builione, graduate student Columbia U., presented their finds on how members of 11 major symphony orchestras perceived each other. Percussionists were viewed as “insensitive, unintelligent, hard of hearing, yet fun-loving.” Strings = “arrogant, stuffy and unathletic.” Brass = “loud”; Woodwinds = held high esteem “quiet, meticulous, though a bit egotistical.” Conclusion = how could orchestra ever come together to make such wonderful music? Answer = regardless how each musician wrongly or rightly perceived each other, subordinated their feelings and submitted to leadership of conductor and purpose of orchestra. = together they play beautiful music.

Conclusion: Remember putting your face above a headless frame painted to represent some far-out character = e.g. muscle man, clown, even a bathing beauty? Many of us have had our pictures taken this way. Photos are humorous, why? Because the head doesn’t fit the body.

Use to illustrate how world often looks at Church. How does this community and area view this Body of believers. Picture with me Christ as the HEAD of this body, does the world laugh at the misfit or do they stand in awe and respect of how such a body is so closely related to her Divine Head?

Our unity is essential in having this community and area recognize you and I fit with Christ as Head!

Unity is our greatest tool!