Ephesians 4:1-6

The Unity of the Spirit and Christian Unity

Sermon

Any good company has a "vision" and "mission" statement that is crafted based on the beliefs and values of the corporation. Each person within the corporation needs to be committed to the mission of the corporation. The leadership of the corporation works hard to maintain the unity of that vision and mission, because the vision and mission represents the product that they are promoting or selling.

Last week I talked about how branding in a corporation is everything and I mentioned McDonalds, BMW, and Restore Hair. Each of those brands bring something to your mind about the product. McDonalds – fast food. BMW – quality German engineering. Restore Hair – Brian Urlacher on billboards (or maybe Brian McClain, your pastor). Each of these corporations have mission statements that tell you what they value: McDonalds – "*to make delicious feel-good moments easy for everyone*." BMW – "*to move people with products that evoke emotions.*" Restore Hair - to help people regain their confidence and self-esteem by providing hair restoration solutions. (I could use that right now). A company's mission statement should tell you something about the company.

We have a mission statement here at River Ridge Church: ***To Glorify God and Advance His Kingdom by Loving Others to Christ.***

We are asking all of you to come along with us in seeing this mission realized in our church and outside our church walls. ***To glorify God***: We know that God created us to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever and ever. ***To Advance His Kingdom***: We have become citizens of God's Kingdom through faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ and we desire to be ambassadors for our King to the world around us. ***"by loving others to Christ"*** – the means by which we glorify God and advance His Kingdom is by receiving, enjoying, and spilling out onto others the love of Jesus Christ.

Paul has given a mission statement in Ephesians. It's found in 1:10:

> **as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. (Eph. 1:10)**

This world is filled with disunity and hostility…the things in heaven and things on earth have been turned upside down through the fall. We are hostile to God and hostile to one another. But God has a mission to restore all things through Jesus. The vision that is uniquely

shared in Ephesians, is that God unites all things "in Christ". Through the blood of Jesus that paid for our redemption from the slavery of sin and Satan we are now reconciled to God. Through His body, the church, God reconciles us now to one another and sends us out on a mission to be His ambassadors. This is our calling. Our calling is not only to be redeemed from sin, but to also bring God's plan of reconciliation to the world around us.

Here in vv.4-6 Paul shares with us 7 affirmations of faith that begin with "one", that we are to be united under.

What we believe about God unites us together just as much, if not even more, than how we treat one another. One commentator put it this way – "Unity is Motivated by Theological Oneness". A "oneness" or "unity" regarding what we believe. In other words, in order for us to maintain unity in the church, we must maintain unity regarding what we believe.

Why is unity so important to Paul? As I said last week, the PRIMARY reason we are to maintain unity is NOT because unity is essential for fellowship together (and it is!)…the PRIMARY reason we are to maintain unity is because God Himself is ONE and the church is to represent God. Father, Son, Spirit – each distinct and diverse persons, but ONE GOD. ***The church is a GOD-born corporation of redeemed people who are incorporated into the body of Jesus, and sent out by the power of the Holy Spirit to be the representation of God to the world around us (repeat).*** This means that we need to look like the one we represent. God is holy, therefore, the church is called to holiness. God is love, therefore the church is called to love. God is ONE, therefore the church is called to unity.

What we have here in vv.4-6 is quite possibly a direct quotation of an early creed, or at least an allusion to an early Christian creed. A creed is a formal statement of Christian beliefs, the purpose being to unify people who are committed to the same Christian beliefs. Kind of like a mission statement. Especially in the early years of the church before the NT was completed, creeds were a way to guard the faith and protect the unity of the church – they would recite, memorize, even sing these kinds of statements to one another.

Let's look at it together…

> **There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:4-6)**

Some initial observations. First, again, notice the focus on "unity" – "one" is used with each affirmation of faith. **Second, notice that Paul gives affirmations of the Trinity.** In v.4 there is "One Spirit". In v.5 there is "One Lord", which in the NT is consistently used to speak of Jesus. In v.6 there is "One God and Father". **Finally, notice that there are what you might call "sub-affirmations" that are each associated with each member of the Trinity.** In v.4 you have the

Spirit with the sub-affirmations of "one body" and "one hope" so that there is a link in Paul's mind between the Spirit and His work of placing us into "one body" that has "one hope". In v.5 - The Lord Jesus is associated with the sub-affirmations of "one faith" and "one baptism". And in v.6 "God the Father" has a further description of being over, through, and in all things – even the Son and the Spirit.

Back to our example of the military: If Paul were talking of the military, he might say something like this: "there is one platoon leader" who has one platoon that has one hope of victory as they go into battle together. And that platoon has been assigned to one "Colonel", who oversees the platoon's unity and fidelity, and there is One Commander in Chief, the President, who is over the entire military and our country. You have an order and a hierarchy. Each member of the Trinity is equally and fully divine but has specific roles within a specific order, just as the platoon, the colonel, and the president all are equally Americans and equally serve within the military…but with different and unique roles. Each role is committed to the united plan of God.

First, let's look at the Spirit…

1. **There is One Spirit who places us into one body with one hope**

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – (Eph. 4:4)

Another reason Paul begins with "One Spirit" is because in v.3 he just said, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and then he abruptly says, "one body and one Spirit" (lit. translation – "there is" not original). His focus is on the unity of the church and "ONE Spirit" who has placed each member into "ONE body", the church. It is the Holy Spirit that has placed you and I into the body of Christ at the moment of our calling or conversion. The classic passage to see this is in 1 Corinthians 12:13:

> **For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. [13] For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free [that means everybody, everybody who puts their faith in Jesus can be a part of this body] —and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:13)**

There is a close association in the mind of Paul between the Spirit of God and the Body of Christ because it is the Spirit who places us into the body of Christ. What Jesus has accomplished, the Spirit now applies. To see the gathering of God's people as a "body is an entirely new concept in the NT. Body language is a beautiful metaphor for the church because a "body" has great diversity of parts that each work together for the good of the entire person. When you touch a hot stove, every part of your body immediately shifts its focus to the pain (all

other tasks are dropped) - the sensory nerves immediately send impulses to your spinal cord where reflex happens, the spinal cord sends impulses to your motor nerves that cause the muscles in your arm to pull away from the stove immediately, your brain then begins to assess the damage on your hand by observing with your eyes, and your feet move towards the cool water or towards a bandage of sorts. Every part of your body is involved with a unified goal – to help the hand that was damaged. This is how the church is to function! Many members all working together as one body.

Notice how in this passage Paul links "one body" with "one hope". Where do you go for hope in a world that is filled with despair and gloom? I've noticed something…over the years Lorrie and I have had many friends who are Christians that isolate themselves from the church, and ***in every case*** there is a tendency towards slipping into depression and despair and foolishness. The church is a "hope-filled household". When we isolate ourselves from the church, we isolate ourselves from hope, because the church is where a brother or sister in Christ will put their arm around your shoulder and carefully and consistently assess your pain and point you to the "hope of your calling".

"Hope" is defined by one commentator in this way – "**an eager expectation of the outworking of God's plan**". God has a plan in Ephesians, in the church, in your family, and in your life – and you can "eagerly expect" that plan to unfold just as God means it to. That's the "hope that belongs to your call" – not "I hope things might work out", rather, "I KNOW things will work out for good because God has a plan and it's a good plan!" When someone is in despair and they slide into church (maybe this is you this morning?), with their head down, and all seems lost we can put our arm around them and say, "remember the hope of your calling! God has this! God is in control! God is going to work it out. All is not lost!" And we turn to page after page of Scripture – "remember the despair of Abraham…in Romans 4:18 we learn that "in hope he believed against hope" – he didn't see a way, but he knew that God had a plan! Remember the despair of Joseph…but God had a plan. Remember the anguish of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane – but God had a plan!" The church is to be a beacon of hope because we know something the rest of the world doesn't know – we know the ending!

You and I are CALLED TO OUR HEAVENLY HOME! Eternal life, with new bodies, with Jesus, with one another…no more pain, no more sin, no more sorrow…forever and ever and ever amen. Are you praying for healing? You WILL be healed, it isn't "if" it's "when". Are you frustrated with your own tendencies towards sin? Sin will be GONE! Are you tired and worn out in this old tent of yours, the body – A NEW BODY WILL BE GIVEN TO YOU! Are you frustrated with the evil in this world? Rev. 22:15 - "outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood". We need to preach these truths to one another and we need to keep our eyes on

the “hope that belongs to our call”. This is a unifying factor…when we hope together and wipe our tears away that are falling down onto our grins as we hope together of what eternity might be like – we become one in our one hope that belongs to our call.

2. There is One Lord whom we confess and one faith which we uphold

one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Eph. 4:5)

The OT consistently uses the word “LORD” to speak of Yahweh. When the NT writers use it to describe Jesus it is a sure sign of His deity. The word for Lord is κυριος – it means one who is in charge by virtue of possession or ownership. One who is in a position of authority. It literally means “master”. Confession of JESUS as Lord and not CAESAR was one of the distinguishing factors of Christians in the first and second century – and it got many killed for it. Can you say with all certainty and integrity that Jesus is your Lord? Many people can say, “Lord, Lord”, but Jesus isn’t really their Lord. Just saying He is Lord isn’t enough…it must be demonstrated with the FRUITS of someone who is obedient to their Lord. Is Jesus your Lord? If not, this morning you can repent – you can turn around and follow Jesus. Romans 10:9 tells us – “if you confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord** and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” That confession is proved with fruits of repentance and surrender to Jesus as your Lord. Another way to think of salvation in Jesus is professing your allegiance to Him as your Lord and King. Paul says there is “one faith”…here I think he is talking broadly of “the faith”, not speaking about “one trust” but “the faith” as a unified collection of doctrines that we all confess, uphold, and defend. In the pastoral epistles Paul continually shows that it’s the job of the elders and pastors to guard “the faith”, or the doctrine of the gospel. In Jude we read that we are to “contend for the faith once and for all delivered to us” (Jude 3). The gospel is the good news that the King, Jesus, has come to restore God’s reign upon the earth and to save His citizens from the punishment of their sins by dying on the cross and rising again. He has ascended to Heaven, and has begun to reign there, but one day He will return and establish His reign here upon the earth. What then does it mean now to “believe in the gospel”? It means to bow the knee and to swear allegiance to the King. He is LORD.

One of the ways that we swear allegiance to Jesus as Lord is through baptism. Baptism is a means through which we “identify” and “confess” Jesus as Lord. Baptism is not what saves us, it’s more like the soldier’s uniform that he wears – he can take off the uniform and he’s still a soldier, but he wears the uniform proudly because of his identification as a soldier. Paul says there is “one baptism”. **Three things to note about baptism:** 1. **Baptism is a command** – Matthew 28 tells us to make disciples and to baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In Acts 2 after Peter preached Jesus to the people they asked him, “what should we do?” He says, “repent and be baptized”. Baptism is an outward statement of your repentance and conversion and it is commanded. 2. **Baptism is a confession** – when we go into

the water we are identifying with the death and burial of Jesus, and when we come out of the water we are identifying with His resurrection to new life. Baptism is a very practical event - In Romans 6 Paul is addressing whether or not Christians should continue to walk in sin…and he points to their baptism (6:4) because baptism is a confession that we are united to Jesus in His death, burial, and resurrection – to live a life of sin is to deny our allegiance to Christ and to deny our confession of who we are in baptism. Like a soldier who denies or betrays the flag on the uniform that he wears. 3. **Baptism is communal** – Paul brings up baptism here showing how essential it is because it is communal and unifying. **Kind of like how a polar plunge** is unifying…you go with a group of people and plunge yourself in (don't ever ask me to do this by the way) and after you have a story to tell of how you all went under together. Our baptism unites us to all who uphold the faith and who confess Jesus as Lord. If you have not been baptized, as an adult, because I firmly believe that baptism is for adults only – again, it's a confession of Jesus as Lord that children can't confess – then you need to be baptized in obedience to Jesus.

3. There is One God and Father who is Sovereign and has a plan to reconcile all things

one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph. 4:6)

Once again there is the word that Paul uses over and over again in Ephesians – "all" or "all things". This word, παντα, is consistently used in ancient Jewish and Greek texts to refer to "everything that exists". 4 times here in this verse παντα is used of the Father being "of all things", and "over all things", and "through all things" and "in all things". This is a strong statement of the absolute and pervasive Sovereignty of God. That God is ***transcendent*** – "of all" and "over all"; and that God is ***immanent*** - "through all things and in all things" - immanent, intimately connected to all things. As the kids song goes, "He has the whole world in His hands" – things in heaven and things on earth. And He has a plan that is providentially working throughout all history that cannot be thwarted.

In closing, back to the mission statement - In 1:10 we have the Father's ***plan*** to "unite all things"… "things in heaven and things on earth". In 1:22-23 we saw the risen and seated Jesus Christ who has ***accomplished*** victory and is seated as King over "all things", and His body, the church "in Him" is described by Paul as "the fullness of the One who fills all things in all places". In 1:13-14 we saw that we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit who ***applies*** and guarantees all that the Father has ***planned*** and the Son has ***accomplished***. The Father plans, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies all of it in and through His united church.

What I would like to do now is for us to recite together these words out loud to demonstrate our unity with one another. Let's all stand together.

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— [5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Connection Group Questions

1. **Read Ephesians 1:10. In what ways is this passage a fitting mission statement for the book of Ephesians?**
2. **River Ridge Churches Mission statement - *To Glorify God and Advance His Kingdom by Loving Others to Christ.* What are some things that stand out to you about this mission statement?**
3. **Read Ephesians 4:1-16 – what do you think is Paul's purpose for including vv.4-6 in the middle of this passage?**
4. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:13 – what stands out to you about this passage of Scripture?**
5. **How would you define hope? What are some ways that we can encourage one another towards hope?**
6. **We are called to put our faith in Jesus as Lord. Why is it important to see Jesus not only as our Savior but also as our Lord?**
7. **Why is baptism essential to our faith? Have you been baptized?**
8. **Read Ephesians 1:22-23 and Ephesians 4:6 – how are these texts related?**
9. **What response can we give to someone who might say that declaring firm and unchangeable beliefs is arrogant and not humble?**