

## Introduction

Many years ago, long before we launched New City Church, my wife and I dreamed of church planting and would spend lots of time talking about what sort of church we wanted. We attended church planting conferences and read books and pursued church planting assessments. This was before most people “in the pew”, so to speak, had ever heard of church planting. When we began telling friends and family we were thinking of planting a church we would receive one of two responses. The first was, “What is that?” and the second was, “Why?”. This was right as church planting networks and certain celebrity church planters were becoming popular.

The books we were reading told us we needed to target a specific demographic, a group of people who shared much in common. The fewer the differences between the people, we learned, the easier “reaching” a community and “growing” a church would be. Not only was this a great church-planting strategy, it was also an excellent church *growth* strategy! You would put together a strategy to reach “Matt and Monica Millennial” or “Scott and Stephanie Suburbanite” and then go and strive to meet their “felt needs”.

Then we joined the YMCA. As we would go to the downtown Y we were struck by something. The Y seemed to be the place that most resembled heaven. There were young and old, black and white, Asian and Hispanic, rich and poor. There were older guys in Velour track suits and younger guys in beaters. There were women who looked like models and women who were Grandmas. There were people with obvious physical shortcomings and people who were freakishly athletic and strong. Despite there being vast differences between them, no one really bothered anyone else, for we were there, in all our diversity, for a common goal. We realized we wanted this new church plant to be like that.

To this day, however, we shake our heads for having such a shortsighted dream of what church could be. Yes, diversity matters and is a significant goal for a church, but it’s not really about demographics. It was easy to imagine a congregation just like the people who showed up at the Y. Different skin tones. Different cars. Different workout music in their headphones. Different pay stubs. Different clothing choices.

At the end of a workout we would all leave separately to go to our separate lives. We would see each other again on Thursday and would do the dance people do when trying to squeeze in a set on the same weight machine. Then we would finish our workouts and all leave separately to go to our separate lives again. Unless your name were *Dave*, you would never even learn the names of those working out around you.

As great as it is to see diversity in public spaces, diversity for diversity’s sake is not the goal. There is something greater that diversity should accomplish.

## Maintain the Unity of the Spirit

After a long section—the first half of the entire letter—detailing the good news of Jesus in great detail, Paul gets down to business in chapter 4. After calling the Ephesians to sit in the truth of God in Christ, they must walk in a manner worthy of their calling. So often when we hear concepts like this our minds go to avoiding sin. To walk in a holy manner is to not lie and cheat and steal. It is to avoid sexual immorality, et cetera. As Jim showed us last week, that’s not the first thing on Paul’s mind when he tells them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling.

While we should avoid sin and should avoid lying, cheating, and stealing, and we should avoid things like sexual immorality—he will say so later in the letter—Paul’s primary application of the gospel is not an individual instruction, but a corporate one. The Ephesians are to embrace humility and gentleness and patience. These are not personal characteristics that you have all by yourself. Humility is toward others. Gentleness is toward others. Patience is toward others. This is why he then says with these characteristics they are to bear with one another.

This bearing with one another implies there may be difficulty in our relationships. We may not like each other all that much. You root for a different sports team. Or you may not care about sports at all. You read different books. You vote with different priorities. You watch different movies. You eat different foods. You laugh at different jokes. You have different hobbies. You have vastly different life experiences.

If everyone here loved bacon and the Boston Celtics and cycling and watching *the* National Champion Michigan Wolverines and enjoyed videos about particle physics and ran Linux on their computers and used the vim editor to write email in the mutt mail client and used the L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X typesetting engine instead of a word processor and only drank single-origin coffee beans you grind yourself and brew in an AeroPress coffee maker and loved reading epic sci-fi/fantasy novels and loved throwing down ice-cold Coke Zeros and enjoyed ribeyes that are truly done well, which is to say, *medium rare* and were wanna-be woodworkers but really hate working with your hands, I suspect we would all get along really well. What we would not do, however, is maintain the unity the Spirit of God has created, for uniformity is not unity.

The unity God creates in his church may *include* natural friendships or natural community, but God’s unity is not natural. Natural friendships are great; we all have them. We all love hanging out with people just like us, for they affirm us and they “get” us. I would love to be able to say to someone, “Isn’t it frustrating how you can *ask* PackageKit to quit from the command line—even as root—but it *always* ignores you? Why are we even prompted to do so?” I could say this, but no one here would have a clue what I mean. Even if you did, that would be a natural affinity, not a unity created by the Spirit of God.

Unity is only seen in diversity, in our differences. This is why we must *bear* with one another in love. This means to endure. To put up with. You might roll your inner eyes, but never your actual eyes, but you still love that person. It’s one thing to merely endure; it is quite another to endure with love. We do this easily with natural friendships, but we must endeavor even more to do this with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

In their book “The Compelling Community” Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop explain how natural friendships differ from the unity God creates in his church by asking what would

happen if the Spirit suddenly left our church. Would the friendships that have formed be maintained? Or would we begin spending more time with those who are just like us and less time with those who are not? They make this point quite strongly:

If you want to draw a crowd, build community through similarity. That's how people work.

Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop, "The Compelling Community"

We're all drawn to people like us. This is not the church Jesus is building. The church the Lord is building consists of *supernatural* community in the midst of diversity. That's how the Lord works. He is building something the world cannot see anywhere else. I've been in public spaces that were, at least superficially, quite diverse. Concerts. Sporting events. Restaurants. The YMCA. You look around and see a lot of people who aren't like you, but they lack the unity God creates in his church. This morning we're going to look at the basis for the unity we must maintain. It is far deeper and far stronger than any of us could imagine. We're in Ephesians 4.

<sup>Eph 4:4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—<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.

Ephesians 4:4–6

## One Spirit

After issuing his first command in the text—to walk in a manner worthy of their calling and therefore maintain the unity the Spirit has created among them—he explains why. There is one body, he says, and one Spirit. He lists these two together for this is the work of the Spirit. Paul is writing sort of a reverse creed: Spirit, Son, Father. Both the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed follow the pattern of Father, Son, and Spirit, with each section detailing that which is attributed to each Person. God is Trinity so the truth is they are each involved fully and completely, yet this is how God reveals himself.

In the Apostles' Creed we declare we believe in the Holy Spirit and then detail some of his work in this world: the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul sums this up in our text by declaring there is one body and one Spirit.

That is, the Holy Spirit is creating *one body*—not two. This does not mean a particular city will only have one local church. It means that within one local church there is one body, not two. This is why we should never refer to our children's class as "children's church"—as if it were separate and distinct from this body. This is why we do not segregate our one body based on stage-of-life. Our City Groups, for example, are divided up based on the night of the week that works for a particular person, not by the composition of those in the group. We don't have a GenZ group and a Millennials Group and a Hipster-Indie-Rock Group. In the midst of diversity our unity is best maintained.

Most often when Paul refers to a church, he means a local church. Occasionally he means the various local churches in a region and very rarely he means all local churches combined.

There is no “universal” church without the local church, however. When Paul says there is “one body” he means the local church is a united body, not a fractured body.

Think of the importance he has placed on unity within a local church. Why was Paul given the incredible gift to preach the gospel to the nations in chapter 3?

Eph 3:10 ...so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now  
be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.  
Ephesians 3:10

You might recall that God’s means of “showing off” is his church! Whomever these rulers and authorities in the heavenly places are, they take notice of God’s church, for through the church God’s incredible wisdom and power and glory are being made known. Keep in mind the context of this statement. In chapters 2 and 3 Paul is explaining the wonder of the gospel in creating “one new man” out of two hostile groups. Jew and Gentile held each other with great derision. This was an ethnic and cultural and moral and religious hostility that was deeply rooted in historical animosity that went back centuries.

Out of this intense and deep hostility the Spirit of God forms a local church and unites together people who may have nothing in common save for Christ, and out of this diversity the glory of God in the face of Christ is shown. Paul directly connects this to their shared hope. They have one hope, he says. This one hope belongs to their call, and their call is to salvation *in community*. Salvation entails entering into the covenant people of God. This is why Paul wrote chapter 2!

Though the Ephesian believers had once been separated from Christ and had been alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and were strangers to the covenants of promise, in Christ they who were once far off have been brought near. How? Jesus tore down the dividing wall of hostility separating Jew and Gentile. He doesn’t then add them to Israel, but is creating “in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, that he might reconcile us both to God *in one body through the cross*”.

This is the call Paul writes about. They are to walk in a manner worthy of *this* call: their call to join the church of Jesus Christ *in unity*. This is a shared call, for there is one hope that belongs to one call and this is all the work of the one Spirit.

## One Lord

In verse 5 Paul says there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We need to hear this the way they would have heard this. Though the church in Ephesus was largely comprised of Gentiles, they would have been taught the same Scriptures the Jews in Israel had grown up with, which largely means the Greek Old Testament known as the Septuagint.

In the Septuagint whenever the name YHWH appeared, rather than risk using this name in vain, Jews would substitute the name with the words “the Lord”. Our English Bibles often follow this convention by translating YHWH as “the LORD”, with “Lord” in all caps. Israel’s confessional statement uses this expression in Deuteronomy 6:4.

Deut 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.  
Deuteronomy 6:4

This was their regular confession of faith. The expression “the Lord is one” uses the same words in Ephesians. There is *one Lord, the Lord is one*. As followers of Jesus we recognize this one Lord became one of us and walked among us, lived, died, and rose from the dead. Our God is the very same God Israel confessed is the one Lord. When we confess together Jesus is Lord, we are not merely saying Jesus is *in charge*. We are confessing that YHWH God of Israel is Jesus. This is more clear in Greek for it’s just the two words as the word “is” is often implied rather than stated: *Κύριος Ἰησοῦς*—“Lord is Jesus”. The one Lord Israel confessed is Jesus of Nazareth.

To confess together that Jesus is Lord is more than acknowledging his actual identity. Just as Paul connects the Spirit with the one body, so here he connects the one Lord with one faith and one baptism. “Faith” can mean lots of things. We have faith, but here he means *the* faith. As we’ll see in a couple weeks, in verse 13 the Lord has given gifted people to the local church “until we all attain to the unity of *the* faith”. He means the central and core teachings of the Christian faith.

As we’ve been seeing in our study of the book “RetroChristianity” the importance of the core of our faith is summarized by Vincent of Lérins:

All possible care must be taken that we hold that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all.

Vincent of Lérins, the Commonitory

Many of us here were taught, even if *indirectly*, that the center of our faith is the Bible. We’ve all been part of churches that claim they preach the Bible and they stand on the Bible and they defend the Bible. I understand what people are trying to do when they say this, but in saying this they really miss the point. The center of the Christian faith is and always has been the Lord Jesus himself.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he told them he determined to know nothing among them except Christ and him crucified. Even as he was writing Scripture, he did not say he determined to know nothing among them except the Bible. The Bible is the authoritative record of the revelation of Jesus Christ, but Jesus and Jesus alone is the center of our faith. This is why Paul groups together “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”.

We believe in one God who has revealed himself in three distinct Persons yet remains one God. The second Person of the Trinity is the one Lord who has revealed himself by coming to us as one of us. The one faith we share is what has been believed everywhere, always, by all Christians, and this set of beliefs center on the Lord Jesus. This is the *Christian* faith, after all. Faith is the active belief of all Christians.

The one baptism signifies our one entrance into Christ, for we are baptized into Christ. Through baptism we experience union with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. This is the faith we share and the basis for our unity in him.

## One God and Father

This is because there is one God and Father of all. In verse 6 Paul is clear: there is only one Father and he is the Father of us all. There are no natural-born children of God, for all who are in Christ have been adopted as sons of God, for God is our common Father. There can

be no disunity in the church for we are family. The unity we have has been created by the Spirit of God when he called us to faith and repentance. The result of this is our placement in the family of God as adopted sons who inherit everything belonging to the Father.

Throughout Scripture it is the Father's will that is being accomplished. The Father determined to create while the Son performed the act of creation and the Spirit gave life to his creation. The Father determined to save and the Son purchased salvation and the Spirit applies that salvation. This is what Paul is getting at here when he says there is one God and Father of all: there is one, single origin of everything that exists.

Paul says God is over all all, indicating his absolute sovereignty. Since everything exists according to his will, everything belongs to him. The air you are breathing belongs to him. Because it belongs to him, he has the absolute right to determine what that air is used for. The body that makes up who you are is made up of God's atoms, and therefore your skin and bones and muscles and sinews are God's skin and bones and muscles and sinews. Therefore God has every right to determine how he wants you to live and use his stuff. Your life belongs to him.

See the connection here to the unity of the one body being built by the one Spirit. The one God has determined to create for himself a people and the one Lord came to this world as a human, lived, died, and conquered death that he might reconcile those people to the Father. It is because God is sovereign that there can be unity in the church! New Testament scholar Harold Hoehner put it this way:

If believers take God's sovereignty seriously, the result is unity and contentment and joy for believers, even in the midst of trials. The believer will trust God in his wisdom and care for all things that transpire in life.

Harold Hoehner, "Ephesians"

The reason we can take solace in God's sovereignty is because he is not merely sovereign. If he were merely sovereign we would simply be overpowered by his will at every turn. There would no sense of relationship with God. Instead, he is "over all *and in all*". God is personally dwelling in each believer. The presence of God is a corporate experience in the gathered assembly, yet God is also dwelling in each one of us. The fullest manifestation of his presence is in the assembly, but God nevertheless dwells with each believer. This means that whatever comes your way, if you are in Christ, God is with you! This is why we can take solace in God's sovereignty, for it is not a cold, calculated control but a loving and merciful and compassionate sovereignty.

It is this sovereign determination that guides Paul here. He urges the church in Ephesus to maintain the unity created by the Spirit as he builds the church there. By reversing the order we would naturally use to form a creedal statement, Paul is emphasizing God's sovereignty in a way that gives us the real basis for our unity: quite simply, it is God's plan for his people!

As Jim shared last week, the walk we are called to is not something we need to create or invent or even make happen. Based on the truth of the gospel as Paul explains in the first three chapters, we are to walk in a manner worthy of that calling, and that calling is, first and foremost, to unity in the one body of Christ being created by the Spirit. We must *maintain*—not *create!*—that unity. Steven Baugh explains:

By returning to the words “call” (καλέω, kaleō) and “calling” (κλήσις, klēsis) from v. 1, Paul is reminding the audience that to fulfill the mandate of maintaining ecclesiastical unity is their divine calling. This is not an offhand or insignificant part of their Christian life but is at its very center, as he will develop further in 4:11–16 (esp. vv. 15–16).

S. M. Baugh, Ephesians, EEC, 299–300.

This unity is not at the expense of doctrine. There is *one faith*—that faith which has been believed everywhere, always, by all Christians. To deny any part of the core of the Christian faith is to be outside the faith—to be a non-Christian. Paul is not talking about secondary doctrines for which there has never been universal agreement. God’s sovereign will for his church is that we walk in a manner worthy of our calling, and that calling is unity in the one body of Christ, living a life centered on the Lord Jesus Christ and his glory.

### Application

The hard truth here is that Paul *must* instruct the church in Ephesus to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Because the unity he means is not a natural unity—“natural friendships”—it is a supernatural work in their midst. They do not need to create the unity, but maintain the unity. They must not allow anything to divide the unity that is theirs in Christ.

Again, this is not a unity at the expense of orthodoxy. There is no unity if one denies the one Spirit or denies the truth of the one Lord. The Trinitarian faith is the faith Paul is insisting upon. It is this core of our faith that unites us. We don’t have to agree on end times or share a common liturgy or practice. We have a great deal of freedom within the one body and the one body must work to maintain its unity.

It is precisely because this unity is supernatural that maintaining it can be a struggle. The church in Corinth had a problem maintaining unity. In the late first century, perhaps during the apostle John’s lifetime, the church in Corinth had been experiencing division. The church had simply dismissed its older elders and replaced them with younger elders. One of the elders in the church in Rome, a man named Clement, wrote them a letter to urge them to maintain the same unity Paul writes of.

<sup>1</sup> Clem 46:5 Why is there strife and angry outbursts and dissension and schisms and conflict among you? <sup>6</sup> Do we not have one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was poured out upon us? And is there not one calling in Christ? <sup>7</sup> Why do we tear and rip apart the members of Christ, and rebel against our own body, and reach such a level of insanity that we forget that we are members of one another? Remember the words of Jesus our Lord, <sup>8</sup> for he said: “Woe to that person! Rather than cause one of my elect to sin, it would have been good for that one not to have been born. It would have been better for that person to have been tied to a millstone and cast into the sea, rather than pervert one of my elect.”

1 Clement 46:5–8

That is strong language! He is clearly referencing the authority of holy Scripture as the basis for his rebuke, and is referring directly to our text. It is because we have one God, one Lord, and one Spirit that we must maintain our unity. *This is our one calling*, he says. Further, he then cites the words of Jesus himself in Luke 17 to emphasize the importance of maintaining the unity of the Spirit.

This is the work of God in this world. This is our calling in Christ. Through the church the manifold wisdom of God is on display to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. Our part is to maintain this unity created by the Spirit by bearing with one another in love.

Too often we think unity is the same as uniformity. We want people around us who are different, but we want them around us *so they will become like us*. Uniformity is not unity. Listen: the unity God creates in his church is not found in us looking the same. Unity does not mean we have the same skin tone. The unity God creates in his church is not found in us having the same education or income level. The unity God creates in his church is not found in us having the same priorities in voting. What you think is the most important issue may not be what he or she thinks is the most important issue, which may lead to you voting very differently. To cause division in the church over this is to work against God. I promise you, this is not something you want to engage in!

The Spirit creates unity in his church and we are to maintain this unity. Unity in the midst of diversity is the miraculous work of God in this world. When we read the book of Acts and see the spread of the gospel all over the world, we see that it is usually preceded by miracles. In Acts 8, for example, Philip preaches Christ to the *Samaritans*—those who were especially hated by the Jews.

Acts 8:4 Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. <sup>6</sup> And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. <sup>7</sup> For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was much joy in that city.

Acts 8:4–8

In response to the signs and miracles, the people heard his message and embraced the gospel of Jesus. Church, our world needs a miracle as well, and I want you to listen very closely: God in Trinity, Father, Son, and Spirit, has given us a miracle with which to show the world the wonder of his gospel, and it's almost certainly not what you may be thinking.

Jn 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:34–35

This is the miracle God has given us: the miracle of his church. He has created us to be his people who, though we are diverse in so many ways, nevertheless love one another and bear with one another. We don't have to look the same. We don't have to like the same music. We don't have to eat the same foods. We don't have to work in the same jobs. We



don't have to have the same educational achievements. We don't have to vote the same. Paul didn't say there is one culture. He didn't say there is one candidate. He didn't say there is one ethnic group.

Paul said there is one body and one Spirit who calls us to one hope. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Our common confession is "Jesus is Lord". Unless one of these other things that might distinguish us from one another or unless some other person is greater than the Lord Jesus, he is our unity, and we cannot break this unity. While the YMCA may have diversity, it doesn't have—it *cannot have* unity in the midst of that diversity. Only God in Trinity can give that.