

The Gospel Unashamed

"From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half-truths, from the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth, O, God of Truth, deliver us."

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CHRISTIAN UNITY

-- By Chris Ponchot

Unity is an important goal for Christians today. We have a strong desire to be together, for we have very little in common with the rest of society. Jesus called His followers out of the world. No longer do we Christians serve ourselves or live for our own pleasures. We died to the world and its ways. We are to be united in Christ Jesus.

A good example of unity is found in the branches of the U. S. military: marines, army, air force, and navy. They have different jobs, serve different commanders, and have different training, and, yet, they are united under one banner, the American Flag.

Christians have different backgrounds, skills, and training, but we are united under one banner, Jesus Christ. We present a united front against Satan's forces of evil. The greater the number in Christ's united army, the greater the impact on the world.

Jesus desires all Christians to have unity. **John 17:21**, "That they may all be one; just 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".

His High Priestly prayer was given moments before His arrest which led to His crucifixion. He prayed all believers would be united under the apostles' message. He desired a compound unity where there are no divisions or splits, but that all submit to Jesus as Lord, worshipping Him in spirit and in truth and serving each other in love.

The issue is that Christians have splintered off in different denominations, and even different sects of the same denomination, breaking the unity Jesus had planned for us as revealed in Scripture. We even find Christians, who are united in faith and practice, staying separate from one another in different church buildings with very little interaction.

Jesus designed the Church to be one, united in Scripture and in fellowship. The individual members of Christ's Church need one another, and yet, we do not always work together well. How can we expect to impact the world for Christ if we hardly associate together?

The Apostle Paul persuades Christians to walk in a manner worthy of Jesus' calling. **Ephesians 4:1-3**, "1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3

being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

In essence, he is saying, "Live up to the standard of holiness in the salvation God graciously gave to you." A major part of walking worthily to our calling is diligently maintaining Christian unity. We have unity in the Spirit. We must work hard at preserving and protecting it, otherwise we might splinter off into different groups who stay in isolation.

This begs the question, "What unity are we maintaining?" In **Ephesians Chapter 4**, Paul writes about "seven ones" that show how we are united. Wilbur Fields wrote in his commentary, *The Glorious Church*, "All the divisions of the religious world - Christian, professed Christian, and non-Christian - are a result of violation of one or more of these seven unities." There are seven realities that are important for us to understand if we are to stand together under Christ.

The First Reality is the One Body - **Ephesians 4:4a**, "There is one body..."

The Church is often referred to as the Body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "12 For just as the body is one and yet has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit."

Ephesians 1:22-23, “22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and made Him head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.”

Colossians 1:18, “He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”

A human body has many parts and functions, all meant to do the will of the head who commands the body to move.

The Church is Christ's Body with Jesus Himself as the head. Every Christian is a member of Christ's Church, and if a member of His Church, then a member of His Body. If we are the Body of Christ, and we are, then we do what He says. He is the ultimate authority over His Body.

We maintain the unity of the Body through love and peace - **Colossians 3:12-15**, “12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, *and* patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so *must* you *do* also. 14 In addition to all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ, to which you were indeed called in one body, rule in your hearts; and be thankful.”

Letting Christ rule in our hearts means we will be like Him. He is the dominating factor in our lives. When we follow His lead, we hold to the unity of being one Body.

The Second Reality is the Unity of One Spirit – **Ephesians 4:4b**, “...and one Spirit...”

We have His Holy Spirit living in us. The promise given for all believers who repent and are baptized is that they will be forgiven of their sins and receive the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit - **Acts 2:38-39**, “38 Peter said to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus

Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.”

The Spirit regenerates us and begins the sanctification process, applying the redemptive work of Christ to us - **1 Peter 1:2**, “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

All Christians have the Holy Spirit in them, empowering them to live the Christian life - **Philippians 2:12-13**, “12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for *His* good pleasure.”

Maintaining the unity of the Spirit means walking by the Spirit - **Galatians 5:24-25**, “24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let's follow the Spirit as well.”

The Third Reality is the Unity of the One Hope – **Ephesians 4:4c**, “...just as you also were called in one hope of your calling.”

Our hope in Jesus is our anchor. **Hebrews 6:18-20**, “18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to hold firmly to the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a *hope* both sure and reliable and one which enters within the veil, 20 where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

It is our anchor because our hope keeps us grounded in Jesus and immovable. We know that God does not lie. He has promised salvation

with Jesus as our High Priest, offering Himself as the sacrifice for sin in our place that we may be saved. Now Jesus has entered the veil of Heaven ahead of us and we know that we will be with Him one day.

Biblical hope is not wishful thinking, such as, “I hope I win a car,” or “I hope I get this job.” Scriptural hope is “*confident expectation of something good that lies in the future*” (Jack Cottrell, *The Faith Once for All*, pg. 385). The good thing we are confidently looking forward to is the resurrection of our bodies and eternal life in Heaven (**1 Corinthians 15:50-58**, **1 John 3:2**). We maintain the unity of hope by encouraging one another with the surety of our resurrection in Christ.

The Fourth Reality is the Unity of the One Lord – **Ephesians 4:5a**, “one Lord...”

The word “Lord” means “Master.” Think of a King who has absolute authority over his subjects. His subjects have an obligation and responsibility to submit to his commands. Jesus has been given all authority in creation by God the Father - **Matthew 28:18**, “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me.”

Jesus was equal in Nature to God the Father, and yet, He submitted to Him. He humbled Himself by becoming a man and obeyed to the point of dying on the cross. Thus, God gave Him the highest Name in all creation - **Philippians 2:5-11**, “5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, as He *already* existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself *by* taking the form of a bond-servant *and* being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross. 9 For this reason also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE

WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and *that* every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

As God’s creation we have an obligation to obey the absolute authority of the Lord of creation, Jesus Christ. We maintain the unity of the one Lord by helping each other submit to His authority as revealed in Scripture.

The Fifth Reality is the Unity of One Faith – **Ephesians 4:5b**, “...one faith...”

In the context of **Ephesians 4**, the word “faith” refers to the body of doctrine or truth based on Christ and the apostles that outlines our daily living. Later in **verse 13**, Paul uses the term “unity of *the* faith” (emphasis added), based on the knowledge of the Son of God. Most often, when faith is used in reference to the body of truth in Christ, it has a definite article (**the**) in front of it: “**the** faith.”

We are united by the standard of truth, holiness, and righteousness established by Christ through His apostles. We maintain that unity by helping each other grow mature in the faith and base our daily living on their commands and precedents.

The Sixth Reality is the Unity of One Baptism – **Ephesians 4:5c**, “...one baptism.”

The one baptism that all Christians today have partaken in is the baptism into the name of Jesus for salvation (**Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38, 1 Peter 3:21**).

It is the baptism in which we take part in Jesus’ death and resurrection which results in eternal life - **Romans 6:1-4**, “1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? 2 Far from it! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? 3 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into

death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life.”

All Christians have come under the blood of Christ and are sons of God through their faith in Him having been clothed with Christ in baptism - **Galatians 3:26-28**, “26 For you are all sons *and daughters* of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

We are brothers and sisters because we have obeyed the gospel by our submission to baptism in Jesus. We maintain the unity of baptism by continuing the practice that the apostles started at the command of Jesus.

The Seventh Reality is the Unity of One Father – **Ephesians 4:6**, “One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.”

God the Father has acquired that title because of the role He plays in creation and salvation. The Father made the plan for salvation from sin based on His foreknowledge - **Acts 2:22-24**, “22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—23 this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. 24 But God raised Him *from the dead*, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power” and has begotten Jesus as His only Son - **John 3:16**, ““For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.” He is the Father of creation and of the redeemed believer, thus He is above all.

The Father is through all and in all. He is intricately involved in this world and is all-powerful - **Jeremiah 23:23-24**, “23 “Am I a God who is near,” declares the LORD, “And not a God far off? 24 Can a person hide himself in hiding places So that I do not see him?” declares the LORD. “Do I not fill the heavens and the earth?” declares the LORD.”

He can do all things, having no limits. God is also Sovereign; He is able to use man (with his free will) to accomplish His purposes.

All of creation points back to God as Creator - **Romans 1:18-20**, “18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes, that is*, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, being understood by what has been made, so that they are without excuse”, and He holds it all together through Jesus:

Colossians 1:16-17, “16 for by Him all things were created, *both* in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions, or rulers, or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.”

If we want to maintain Christian unity, we need to hold fast to these seven realities that make us one. Imagine how God could use us if we stood together under the banner of Christ and His Word. We could impact the world in a way we never thought possible. The kind of unity which makes such a strong impact is only found in Christ. So, unite in Him.