

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 4

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.”

''Unity in a Divided Time''

In chapter four of Ephesians we are going to be speaking a great deal about unity... Paul will speak of the one body, the one Spirit, the one hope, he will speak of one Lord, one faith, one baptism, along with one God and Father of all... Yes, there are seven which of course is the number of completion!

So, as we prepare to dig into all of this, it would be good to remember what unity is and what unity is not... And that will be our focus for this morning.

- **In some ways it is like comparing the concept of eternity in some form of Eastern nirvana with the Nature of our Triune God and what it means to be in Christ.**

The Eastern thinking sees nothing but conflict in the material world and looks for a time when everything reaches an eternal state of nothingness or nirvana: We as individuals are seen as something like drops of water that will one day come together in an eternal ocean with no conflicts.

Yes, you have a BIG ocean but all significance of the drop of water is lost.

When unity is spoken of in the Scriptures it is speaking about bringing all things together IN Christ...

**This Biblical unity is not a blending of everyone into a unified whole:
Like placing those individual drops of water into the ocean.**

Rather, as we are told in the first chapter of Colossians it is the gathering of all things together in Christ:

Colossians 1:15 “[Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

In salvation, God brings all things together under the reign of His Son Jesus and thus no individual is lost to the whole, just as each part of a body has its individual role and function:

- **You have what is called unity and diversity.**

And to understand the importance of what that means we must of course remember the very Nature of God which is the ultimate picture of Unity and diversity.

- **How individuals can be significant without taking away from the whole...**

We often cover this at length on Trinity Sunday when we turn to the Athanasian Creed to help us describe how the Bible reveals the Nature of our Triune God:

The creed goes into great detail in describing how some of the relationships between the Persons of the Godhead are revealed: “The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten. The Holy Spirit is of the Father, neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.

[Each Person of the Trinity is unique] So, there is one Father, not three fathers; one Son, not three sons; one Holy Spirit, not three holy spirits. And in the Trinity none is before or after another; none is greater or less than another, but all three Persons are co-eternal together and co-equal. So that in all things, as is aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.”

- **Thus God by His very nature is both diverse and unified.**

Those who have seen the Schaeffer series How Should we then Live? will remember him speaking of the particulars and the universals, the one and the many, or as the Creed says, unity in Trinity or the One in Three.

- **This is why the Bible can proclaim that God is love!**

The Apostle Paul will now help us to understand & consider the many unities he speaks of in light of God's Nature because they have many practical implications in our everyday lives.

For example, Paul will speak about marriage in chapter five, where two become one: To see unity and diversity we need to ask a simple question about any married couple: What is more important:

- **Them as individuals or their marriage?**

IF this world was not created by the Triune God who is love, or as King Solomon said, there is just life under the sun...

- **Then you have a dilemma that simply cannot be solved.**
- **How would we from a strictly human perspective, without God or His revelation, decide which is more important?**

If we attach more importance to the individuals, then the marriage suffers. We don't have to look very far today to see evidence of this.

If we put all the focus on the marriage with no concern about the individuals then it is the individual who suffers which we can certainly see in the way that many women are treated around the world.

Now there have been thousands of books written trying to find the right balance from a human perspective...

And sadly this list can even include many Christian books when they also just function under the sun.

- **This is why we must affirm that marriage is God's institution:
His plan for the lonely man!**

It was not good for man to be alone and thus God created woman and established marriage...

- **And it is in marriage where we most clearly see the Triune nature of our God who is love, demonstrated in the creation.**

With this proper understanding of the Trinity we do not have to bring down the marriage to highlight the individuals or ignore the individuals to focus on the marriage!

Just as we need NOT diminish the Godhead in order to focus on the Father the Son or the Holy Spirit nor must we ignore the persons of the Trinity to see the majesty of the one true God.

If we remember the Triune Nature of our God, then we can properly understand the institution of marriage and appreciate the glorious love it can show forth both as individuals and together as a couple.

- **The Apostle will go on to include children in chapter five, where we will see that the same principal is true with the extended family.**

We don't have to say that the family or the individuals are the most important, they are **BOTH** important and we can rightly affirm this because God has revealed His own nature which the family reflects in some small way.

And finally, we can consider what will garner the Apostle's greatest attention: The Church which will be the major focus here in chapter four:

- Paul declares that we are the Body of Christ but that we are also individual members of that body.
- Again we see the one and the many!

Rightly understanding God's nature helps us to rightly understand how we all work together as a local church AND how all the local churches should & can work together as the world-wide Body of Christ...

- Yes, we do have much work to do on that front and we will spend a good deal of time on that subject in the coming weeks!

As part of that we will consider some of today's discussions & battles, that relate the consideration of how families also make up a local church and how the two relate to one another.

Some say that all the emphasis should be on the family which God has established as the nurturing ground for our children...

While others say that we must see the Church as central, where we come only as individuals who have been baptized into a new family.

- Again, when we rightly understand God's Nature we see that **BOTH** the body and the families, or individuals, that comprise that body are important!

So with that in mind, how are we to picture unity?

We looked to the Psalms last week for help in seeing how we are to walk worthy of our calling in Christ: David spoke of God leading us with His eye rather than leading us with a bit & bridle like one would a horse on a farm. Such practical images help us to understand complex principals!

So as we consider the subject of unity this morning I want to again turn to the Psalms where we find unity pictured for us in Psalm 133:

And again, we have images to help us understand what unity looks like:

Psalm 133: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious oil upon the head, Running down on the beard, The beard of Aaron, Running down on the edge of his garments. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, Descending upon the mountains of Zion; For there the Lord commanded the blessing— Life forevermore."

Now we do not live in a priestly nation and many of us are city folk, so we may not fully appreciate those images and how they relate to both the unity the Apostle will ask us to protect and to the unity we must strive toward.

Psalm 133 ends by saying that God commanded a blessing: So what is the blessing in those two images of oil running down Aaron's beard and dew in the morning?

I think both relate to God's care: His care over all of creation & His people!

Think of that morning where you look out over the country side and everything looks so fresh and new with a morning dew sent by God?

- All is brought together in unity under that dew!

In the time before the coming of Jesus, the High Priest was the center of God's salvation for His people and that oil was the sign of God's blessing upon the man that would lead His people: One man who united all of God's people under His care.

- **Thus, we have God's care over the entire Creation and all of His people!**
- **We are to know and believe that God's Spirit continues to guard and care for all of Creation and His people, the Body of Christ.**

Certainly, something to remember as we face both a new virus that can make us pretty ill, and the reactions that may cause considerable harm to our lives and economy as well.

If you did not take time to review some of the historical information that Paster Cogbill linked in our church e-mail, it would make for some good study and discussions this week!

Now, I mentioned a given unity and a unity to strive for because yes, the Apostle is going to speak about two types of unity here in chapter four:

- **A unity that we are to keep and a unity that we are to strive for.**

There are things that are given and there are things that must be worked out, much like we saw with our own salvation as we considered faith and works under Grace last week. We are saved by Grace through faith, and we are called to walk in the good works we were created in Christ Jesus to walk in.

We are never to doubt our salvation because it is God Who has saved us, but we are to always be striving to walk more faithfully with Christ. When we consider the state of the Church, the Body of Christ, today it may seem a bridge to far to discuss either given unity or a hoped for unity, but again we must remember that God knows where history is going and has given us information in both His Word and Church history to help us along. In the coming weeks we will spend time not only in Ephesians 4, but also in I Corinthians 12, because right out the gate there were problems with unity in the Church!

We should all be familiar with the struggles in the Church at Corinth and most of them revolved around divisions rather than unity, so let me close this morning with an encouragement to read that important book as some homework and leave you with a tease about what the Apostle Paul will teach us in the coming weeks here in Ephesians chapter four: There in I Corinthian chapter 12 we read in part:

“12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being 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 have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact the body is not one member but many. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. 26 And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.”

- **A unity and diversity that is intended to reflect the very Nature of our Triune God!**

Communion Meditation: Psalm 37

37 Mark the blameless man, and observe the upright; For the future of that man is peace. 38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together; The future of the wicked shall be cut off. 39 But the salvation of the righteous is from the Lord;

He is their strength in the time of trouble. 40 And the Lord shall help them and deliver them; He shall deliver them from the wicked, And save them, Because they trust in Him.