

United as One

Ephesians 4:6–10

Carl Trueman, in his book, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*, describes the root cause of the self-defined identity chaos we experience in our day. He observes that the locus of truth — what is real and fixed — has dramatically shifted from external to internal. Emotions and imaginations are now where the finds truth. What I feel is fixed true because I feel it — until I don't. Then yesterday's truth is no longer true, and it morphs into something else. This departure from God's objective truth — truth which reflects his character — this departure is as immoral as it is unsustainable.

Think of it like this: I walk out on a pier at a lake and look down at fish swimming in the water. They are quite at home there. God created them with gills to extract oxygen from the water, so they live and flourish there. They thrive and move and efficiently do *all things fish* in the lake. They glorify God as they live as he determined. This is good. Now what I observed about the fish is objective external reality — it is true apart from me regardless of what I think or feel internally. As **real** and **vital** and **good** as it is for that fish to live in water, it is also true that I am created to live on land and breathe oxygen. Now, what if I decide I am a fish? The moment I undertake to establish a new underwater home I move away from life to death. I discover the objective reality that I have lungs that breathe in oxygen from the air; I can't extract it from water. If I want to live and thrive, I must **move to**, and **embrace** objective truth about who I am — truth determined by holy God. As I live in his world according to his plan there is life and blessing and moral good. If I resist God's design, I immediately have problems. I depart from moral good and the blessings of life that go with it.

In a similar way, there are realities that every member of the body of Christ, the Church, must orient to, and live by if we are to experience the fullness of his life and blessing, the peace that he puts in the church — peace we are to eagerly pursue — and the goodness of the fruit of His spirit. Our text this morning orients us to the reality of who we are as brothers and sisters in Christ if we have come to trust him and entered into Christ through faith. To live and thrive as the body of Christ, to glorify God, and proclaim his gospel, and enjoy the sweet unity and communion he places in the church, let's live in the reality of who we are in Christ. Let's read and ask for God's help in understanding who we are and where our focus must be. We worked through vv 1–3 last week, but we'll read them for the sake of context.

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Ephesians 4:1–10 — ¹ I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ 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. ⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”

⁹ (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

PRAY

One — vv 4–6

We don't determine doctrines or what is important based on the number of repetitions. If God says something once, it is eternally significant. But when we see something repeated — particularly in close proximity, maybe we should pay attention.

In vv 1–3 we are to (1) cultivate, or maintain the unity the Spirit places in the Church. He places it there; we actively promote and pursue it. (2) We do that eagerly in humility, with gentleness, long-suffering love. So we have (1) the **bull's-eye** of unity, (2) the personal disciplines of unity, and now (3) the objective truths of unity. If unity has a number, what is it? One, one, one, one, one, one, one. Seven “ones” in 3 short verses. With your Bible scholar's hat on, do you sense that there is something important for the Church to take note of in these verses? Here are the objective truths we are to adjust our lives to as members of Christ's body. We are not free to demand unity around a personal preference, what I think we should do. The objective standards for unity are in God, not us.

There is one body — the body of Christ, the Church. The unity of the Church begins and ends with the work of our trinitarian God. God the Father predestined us for adoption into Jesus Christ. We are his adopted children experiencing life united in his body. It's not our church; it's his church. It is not my church family: it's his family. I understand the sweetness of those terms, and I'm not reprimanding you for using them. Let's consciously remember that we are brothers and sisters only by his work of grace. Otherwise we remain children of wrath. The first objective truth we are to orient ourselves to is that we are adopted into Christ's body, and he is the only Savior.

There is one Spirit, the third person of the trinity, who indwells us and places us in Christ.

There is one hope that belongs to your call, and it is the hope that we are redeemed in Christ. There are alternate routes for you or anyone else. There is no sense in which one is better off than another, or one is worse than another. We were all dead in our trespasses and sins, but we have been made alive in Christ alone. My one hope, your one hope, is that I am not my own, but belong, body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. So the catechism teaches us.

Our unity is in the person and work of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life that God gives; And unity is governed by doctrinal truth. **Person and promise**, and **doctrine**.

There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

Jesus is Lord. He is co-eternal God, uncreated, born of a virgin, crucified on a cross, died, buried, resurrected, and ascended to his throne. The church of the Lord Jesus, is unified in the objective truth of the deity of the Lord Jesus. We are not united with those who claim the Christ at some point became God, or that he was created. That's Arianism, Patrick, and it's the position of a number of cults who claim to be Christian, such as Mormons, who now, ironically, want to be called the Church of the Jesus Christ. We have no unity with those who deny the deity and lordship of Christ.

We have one faith. We believe that the work of Christ as our sin-bearing substitute is the only means of salvation. He finished the work, and there is nothing that we can add to it. We are not united with those who acknowledged that Christ's work was essential, but not adequate in and of itself, so that we have to add work or merit on our own to finish cleaning up what Jesus left undone. This is the doctrine of Rome, and we have no unity with them.

We have one baptism. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into Christ, he places us in Christ. There are not multiple levels baptisms. No baptisms for the dead.

As we saw last week, there are lesser things that should not divide us. But unity is not at any cost. We cannot go join with those who imagine a different Christ, those who trust anything other than Christ, or something in addition to Christ. Doctrinal truth is the foundation of unity.

Person and Promise • Doctrinal principles • Paternity

One in body, Spirit, and hope. One in doctrinal principles — Those are things that focus our attention on objective truth, and not who we are. ***Who*** we are looks very different, and he closes the seven "ones" with the reality that **we have one God and Father over all.**

Jews and Greeks, male and female, wealthy and poor, educated and uneducated — we are all in the same family with the same father, no matter our differences or identities. When we come to Christ, all earth-bound identities drop at the foot of the cross, and we enter into the Father's family by work of his Son. As such, we should have a familial affection for each other. It should be evident to a watching world, and it should be a blessing for us as we care for our brothers and sisters in our Father's gracious Kingdom.

A fractured and social-media-rage-fueled world may make this the hardest aspect of our unity to realize. And yet we are called to it. The first application is in the local church. But the application is global, so that I can go to West Africa and sit in a mud hut with brothers and sisters, that I only met an hour or two before, and worship the Lord Jesus with them in a language I do not know. My heart can be deeply impacted and move to tears by a family who had a father murdered because of his faith. And I can be invited to dinner to have diced goat meat and be cared for, deeply encouraged, and prayed over by a brother that I just met. Because we have one God and Father over all. We are united by our Father.

Now he begins to move from what unites us to the differences evident in each member of the body of Christ. Though united, we are different. There is unity in the body of Christ, but not uniformity.

v 7 — But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Every believer receives the gift of salvation, but beyond that he gifts each believer with one or more gifts in order to build up the body of Christ. What he gives is not for our own edification, but to help the Church. More on that next week, Lord willing, as we move into vv 11–16.

But let's look at Christ's authority to **gift** and **arrange** his body as he will. In v 8 he quotes from Psalm 68, which is in a group of Psalms called **Enthronement Psalms**. These Psalms focus particularly on the kingship of God — He is the conquering, reigning king. Hence we sang Christus Victor this morning.

The cross is necessary for our salvation, but that is not all that happened in his work. After the resurrection he ascended in victory to his rule and reign. He paid the price for sin and conquered the enemies of God, who were also our enemies. It is challenging to understand why Paul places this here as he is talking about gifts to Christians. Scholars do not agree on why it's here. I think that in the broadest sense he is under scoring, the total wisdom and sovereignty of god accomplished in his

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redemptive plan. In light of that, we should appreciate his wisdom in the way he puts the body together and gives different gifts to different people for his purposes. If he saw rules over every power in principality, he cannot be in error in the way he puts the body together. Now, let's examine the ascension of Christ to his reign.

He draws on a celebratory event as a king returns to his kingdom after defeating an enemy. As the conquering king neared his city, messengers ran ahead into the city to announce his return and call them out to meet the king and army. The conquerors paraded through the crowd, enemies in chains, publicly verifying that they were defeated he was the reigning Sovereign. He is the authority. He is the triumphant ruler. The procession included displays of captured booty and wealth of the defeated enemy. People who had been subjects or slaves of the now-defeated ruler— they are displayed as subjects of the victor. The king had authority to do with the wealth and captives as he pleased.

This is a picture of how Christ rescued us from the domain of darkness, and the principalities that were at war against us. We will see more on this when we get to ch 6. The powers and principalities of the spiritual domain darkness — where every soul is enslaved apart from the work of Christ — are now powerless to destroy the souls of those who belong to Christ. We were captives of Satan, but through Christ's conquest we are now his subjects.

Then he points to Christ descending from heaven. This is the language Jesus uses of himself in **John 3:13**. No one ascends to the Father but he who descended from the Father. Jesus first descended from the Father in heaven — on mission, on assignment from the Father. Only he had this mission and authority. His return to the Father in Heaven is the exclamation point: **Mission Accomplished!** Satan is conquered. All the domains and principalities: conquered. He conquered what formerly conquered us. He has taken captive what held us captive. He is our champion. He is our Victor, and we are now subjects of this good King.

As the Victor and reigning King He has the right to give gifts to men to further bless his adopted subjects. Let this truth encourage you and fill you with joy: Our Lord and Savior is now ascended and reigning on his throne. He has not only paid the price for your sin, he has freed you from the domain of darkness, from the power of sin and the powers of evil. He not only gives you his eternal life, he has, by his authority, given you gifts to serve in his Kingdom! You are gifted by this King and empowered by his Spirit to serve and minister in this body in ways that he has uniquely equipped you

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to do. There are things God purposes to accomplish through the means of your life at Redeemer's Grace Church, and he gives you the grace to do them.

We'll close with this: King Jesus is the stack pole of our unity. His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension are what mark our identity and our mission. Human identities, kingdoms, agendas drop as we enter Christ; we seek first the kingdom of God. This is our orientation. Human pride drives us to look for some way or difference that makes me better than you, or more worthy of Christ's grace than you. This was working out in an ugly way in the church in Corinth. They were striving with each other about who had a better spirituality. I follow Paul, so that makes me better. No, I follow Apollos and that makes me better. The really "spiritual ones" said I follow Christ. We live in a day when personal identity trump's God's objective kingdom. It cannot be so. Not for believers, anyway. God's objective truth and objective mission govern us; not personal preferences or goals. Our personal agendas, pursuits, goals are to be harnessed to advance his kingdom with arms linked in the context of the church. There are no Lone Rangers.

My identity, the things that root me in the here and now, in what I feel or tether me to dust are out of sync with reality and what lies ahead. The here and now is to prepare and equip me and my brothers and sisters for meaningful service here and prep me for what lies ahead — because what lies ahead — the Kingdom of God — is the only reality. His Kingdom is forever. His Kingdom is not made of dust but of the imperishable; it is unfading. Unite around this king. Worship this King. Serve his kingdom, and do so particularly by serving those adopted into his body at Redeemer's Grace. We will have unique opportunities for us to do this in the days ahead when we move to a different part of the city. We pray, God will use us to see others, delivered from the domain of darkness and come in as brothers and sisters. It will change us. This is good as long as the change makes us look more, like Jesus, and focuses more on his mission. I'm excited that we get to practice this and live it out and that just ahead.

PRAY