



**The United Church**

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I. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.<sup>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. (Eph 4:1-6 ESV).

A. Recap: The church is both universal and local. It is both invisible and visible.

B. Spiritual Unity

1. Regeneration

a) For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Cor 12:13 ESV)

2. Fruit of the Spirit

3. Gifts of the Spirit

4. The Spirit witnesses to our hearts that we have the same Father (Rom 8:16-17).

C. Credal Unity

1. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus is accursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 12:3 ESV).

2. Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.<sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,<sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.<sup>4</sup> Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in

you is greater than he who is in the world.<sup>5</sup> They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them.<sup>6</sup> We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 Jn 4:1-6 ESV).

- a) Loving God with the mind includes joining our thought life to the rich fountain of the Bible's teachings about things which are beautiful, majestic, fearfully wonderful. We approach the sacred and transcendent. So that Paul would write that whatever things are true, lovely, pure, and excellent we should think upon these (Phil 4:8).
- b) "Doctrinal Soundness" is important both to Church leadership and Church membership.

#### D. Functional Unity

- 1. 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. (1 Cor 12:12 ESV).
- 2. We see "functional unity" at work through the Book of Acts in the different cultural settings and missional assignments of the churches.
  - a) In the present day, a local church or even "para-church work" may find a sort of second layer of unity around points of doctrine which may not be essential to orthodoxy.
    - (1) The fact that there are beliefs which are "non-essential" to salvation does not mean they are not important or that we can not have another layer of unity around these.
      - (a) Should we have an elder who doesn't believe in a literal hell?
      - (b) Should we let a person become a member of our church if they don't believe that

marriage is between one man and one woman?

(c) Is it a good thing for us in our church to insist that we have a culture of believing in the ongoing supernatural work of the Spirit for today? Though someone who does not think this might on all other accounts be welcomed to be a member, should we not still acknowledge that we want to find unity around this topic in our church?

(i) There are lines of affiliation together which, of course, do not make someone a Christian, but do provide a sense of functional unity.

(ii) Even denominations may find a layer of unity around topics like church government, mode of baptism, or the gifts of the spirit. This is not necessarily bad.

**(iii) Unity does not equal uniformity**

b) A church may find a sense of cultural unity in majority or even homogenous settings. This isn't necessarily a bad thing so long as that church seeks to be "culturally aware."

II. Forgiveness and the picture of Moses and Aaron

A. Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down on the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down on the collar of his robes! It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore. (Psalm 133 ESV).

1. The imagery here of Moses anointing Aaron comes just before Aaron would lead the nation in idolatry. Afterward Moses goes to the Lord pleading that He would forgive the people.

2. The Psalm is one of the most beautiful proclamations about unity, but we can easily forget that **unity is forged in the fires of forgiveness.**

III. As we conclude I want to leave us with a thought that I find vital to wrestle with.

- A. In light of the long history of division in the church it can seem daunting to ever see the people for whom Jesus prayed in John 17.
- B. Jesus' plan for the unity of His bride at the end of the age does not include removing the church from trial and fire.
  1. "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15 ESV).
- C. Jesus has a magnificent plan for His global church to arrive at a place of deep unity, agreement, and dependence on one another.
  1. Global pressure, and global presence, will produce a global prayer.
    - a) The Spirit and the Bride say come (Rev 22:17 ESV)
    - b) Even so, come Lord Jesus. (Rev 22:20 NKJV).