

‘That the World May Believe’

In two previous articles I’ve attempted to show that unity in the universal Church is needed for ourselves and for our witness to the world in, at least, three foundational areas: —Jesus is the only way to be right with God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). —Salvation is all of God’s grace and not based on our works of obedience (Ephesians 2:8-9). —We must spread the good news of God’s free grace in Jesus Christ in word and deed to all those who don’t know him (Matthew 5:13-16; 28:18-20).

Using the New Testament book of Ephesians, 4:1-6, Paul shows that unity can be seen in, at least, four ways. We’ve seen that unity is first of all, foundational, i.e. based on the clear teaching of scripture. Second, unity is visible; that is to say that those who are truly Christians will seek, by grace, to live visibly changed lives. Last week we saw that unity is intentional. If the Church is to have a measure of true unity it will take genuine, intentional, grace driven effort. Genuine unity will never happen if we’re merely passive or indifferent. We must seek to be intentional; to guard against anything that would work to interrupt true unity. Paul says this unity is to be ‘maintained’ a word which means to ‘guard or protect or to keep a diligent watch over.’ The picture that Paul wants us to see is of guarding something that is extremely valuable. This unity is ‘maintained’ in the ‘bond of peace’ which is just to say that true peace will bind the church together in unity.

Along with our unity being, foundational, visible, and intentional, lastly I want to call our attention to verses 4-6 wherein Paul teaches us that our unity in Christ and in the Church is unbreakable. We have everything that we need to be properly motivated for genuine unity. Let me try and explain. These verses are unique in that they contain the seven time repeated adjective translated ‘one’ that links together aspects of our salvation as well as the Persons of the Trinity in what some have described as an unbreakable chain. Beginning with ‘one body’ we’re reminded that there is only one true church; every local church is to be a faithful and visible expression of the one, universal, invisible church. Next Paul says, ‘one Spirit’ who is, of course, the Holy Spirit—the third Person of the eternal Trinity. Followed by, ‘one hope that belongs to your call...’ This hope speaks of a settled assurance and reliance on God who always keeps his promises. ‘One Lord’ clearly speaks of Jesus Christ, the second Person of the Trinity and Savior of His people. Next Paul writes, ‘one faith’ which almost certainly speaks of faith in the objective sense—meaning the substance or content of what we believe. ‘One baptism’ may mean water baptism or it could refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit which is common to all believers. Lastly, Paul adds ‘...one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.’

It should not escape our notice that Paul is connecting unity in the Church with the unbreakable unity that links our salvation to God and the unbreakable unity that exists between the three Persons of the eternal Trinity. If we can grasp this—and even though it will

never be perfect in this fallen world—the flow of Paul’s thought seems to be that the church should no more be divided than our salvation can be taken away from us or that there could ever be a division within the Holy Trinity! Paul’s words connect to Jesus’ High Priestly prayer in John 17:20-23 where Jesus prays, “...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.” This is the verse that Dr. Francis Schaeffer called, ‘the final apologetic.’ Schaeffer wrote, “We cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son...and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.” The church should desire and seek genuine unity. There is too much at stake to think or act otherwise.

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