

The Unity Of The Christian Church.

Text: Eph 4:1-6

1) Unity of faith

Suggested Hymns:

2) Unity in love

194, 183, 189, 284, 797

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Ephesians 4:1-6, *¹ 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. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

St. Paul deals with two subjects in this Epistle, with the general walk and conversation of the Christians and with the unity of the Christians.

Of the Christians' general walk and conversation he says; "*¹ 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.*"

Christians should always bear in mind that they have been called and chosen to be God's people. God has adopted them through Christ in whom they believe. For Christ's sake, who bled and died on the cross for the whole sinful world, God has forgiven them all their sins, and received them into His favour, so that He is pleased and delighted with them, as fond parents are pleased and delighted with their children.

But if a child becomes wayward and disobedient, will the parents still be pleased with such a rebellious child? Certainly not! And so God is not pleased with those Christians who do not listen to His voice and do not walk according to the rule of His commandments. They show by their general walk and conversation that they are not God's children.

If you have received the grace of God in Christ, you must prove yourself worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, and walk in this evil world as a true child of God, as the Apostle says; “² *with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.*”

Christians should be Christ-like, and learn from their Saviour who says in Matthew 11:28–29, ²⁸ *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ²⁹ *Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart.* As Christ was meek and lowly, so Christians should seek to acquire a humble and peace-loving disposition to make them kind, generous, and forgiving.

Today we will not dwell at length on this first subject of our Epistle — the Christians' general walk and conversation. We discussed this subject earlier. In the latter part of our Epistle the Apostle introduces a new subject of vast importance. He speaks of the unity of the Christian Church. This is our theme for today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Unity Of The Christian Church Is The Unity Of Faith

The Apostle says, “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.*” Christians should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. What does the Apostle mean by that?

Does he mean that Christians should not care about doctrinal differences, but unite and form one church? In our days church unity is one of the chief topics of discussion in the Christian Church. The advocates of an external union of all the Christians in the world point to our text and say: *Does not Paul distinctly say that the Christians should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace?*

Is it right, then, is it in accordance with Scripture, that the Christians are divided into so many different churches? And that the Christian Church is split into numerous factions and church organisations and denominations, each and every one of them claiming to possess the exact truth, and opposing the others, and accusing them of false doctrine?

And to remedy this sad state of affairs in the Christian Church two ways are proposed. The one way is, that the churches should do away with their confessions. What good have the confessions done in the Christian Church? say the advocates of this measure. They have caused nothing but strife and discord, and every confession means a new division.

Away, therefore, with the confessions and creeds and special dogmas! They are human and not divine. Let the Bible be sufficient! Let all Christians abide by the Scriptures, and unite on the basis of the Bible and nothing more, and there shall be one church.

The other way proposed is, that the different churches remain separate bodies, but consolidate, unite, and form one great corporation like a trust. Why should the distinctive doctrines be a barrier to a general union of all Christian churches? say the advocates of this second measure.

Why should those special doctrines prevent the Christians from extending to another the hand of brotherhood and from fellowshiping together? Do we not all proclaim and believe in the Gospel of Christ? Away, therefore, with that exclusiveness and bigotry and intolerance which so many churches have manifested to this day!

The banner under which all Christians rally is the Gospel of Christ, but the special doctrines of the different churches are of minor importance. Let every Christian hold his own religious views, but let him respect the religious views of his fellow-Christians, and unite, and be one with them.

Let us see if these suggestions are really supported by St. Paul.

In our text the Apostle beseeches the Christians that they should endeavour to keep the unity. What unity? An outward unity? Does he say that the Christians should form an outward organisation, that they should be one external and undivided body before the world, and that it does not matter how much they

differ inwardly as to faith and doctrine? No; he says, “*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.*”

The unity of the Spirit is surely not an outward, but an inward thing. It is unity of faith, as the Apostle continues to say, “*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.*”

How can there be unity of the Spirit in a corporation of churches with different creeds and tenets, one opposing the other? If such a union is effected, it will be a sham and deception.

Sometimes a sort of a union is effected of different sectarian churches in certain localities, and the preachers exchange pulpits, and have common gatherings, and hold union thanksgiving services. But what miserable things are these unions!

How does every church toil for its own ends, and what underhand work is often done to draw away the members from the other churches! There is no unity of the Spirit. There is not one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and therefore the outward union is a delusion.

And how can there be unity of the Spirit in a church without a distinct creed and confession, or with opposing confessions? Take the so-called Evangelical Church, for instance, which unites the Lutherans and the Reformed.

The Lutheran receives the Lord’s Supper with his Reformed brother, and while the Lutheran believes that in the Sacrament he receives Christ’s true body and blood, his Reformed brother believes that he receives nothing but bread and wine. Where is the unity of the Spirit? Where is the one faith?

You see, my friends, St. Paul does not encourage Christians to form external unions in spite of doctrinal differences when he beseeches them to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit. It is unity of faith which he demands.

The Christian Church, according to the Third Article of the Creed, is the communion of saints, it is the great body of all true believers on earth, it is the invisible Church.

And this Church is one in the faith, having one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, and every member of this invisible Church should

endeavour, not to establish a union of all Christians, but to keep the unity of the Spirit, to remain in the faith which will lead him into life everlasting, and thus to be one with all his fellow-Christians in the world.

2. The Unity Of The Christian Church Is The Unity In Love.

Unity in love is another characteristic of the Christian Church.

The Apostle beseeches the Christians that they should endeavour *to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*. The bond of peace is love. The Christians are one before God in faith, and they should be one among themselves in love. Their love should embrace all whom God has loved.

And God loves all people, even the greatest of sinners; for ¹⁶ *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*¹ Now if Christians are loving, good, and kind to all people, how intimately they themselves should be bound together with the tie of love!

The Apostle gives several reasons why this tie of love should bind the Christians together. He says, *There is one body and one Spirit*. In these words he tells us that the Christian Church is an organic body of which believers are the members, and Christ is the Head supplying the vitalising power.

No matter how far Christians are apart, how remote they are from another, how much they differ as to race, language, employment, and other circumstances, they are actuated by the same Spirit, the Spirit of God who dwells in their hearts.

Now if the Christians are all one body, actuated by one Spirit, must they not truly love one another, and help one another, just as in the human body the members serve one another?

The person, therefore, who is an out-ward member of the Christian Church and is void of love to his fellow-Christians, is like a member of the body that has been cut off and is dead. He is not a member of the true invisible Church, for the characteristic of that Church is unity in love.

The Apostle adds, *just as you were called in one hope of your calling*. In these words he assigns another reason why Christians should be bound together with the tie of love. All Christians have one calling and one hope.

There is a great difference among Christians as to their station and calling in this life. There are masters and servants, employers and employees, labourers, merchants, farmers, and the like. There are different professions and trades. Some are rich, others poor. There are kings, and there are beggars.

But their calling and their hope is one. They have been called to eternal salvation, and their hope is for the things that are above. The king has no more to expect in heaven than the beggar. Now if we know that we are making for the same goal, that our common interests are the same, and that in heaven we shall be together eternally, must not the sweet tie of love bind us Christians together on earth?

When Christians meet, therefore, who have never met before, and exchange their views, and become acquainted, they soon become attached to another because the secret tie of Christian love had bound them together even before they knew one another.

Finally the Apostle says, ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*. He is telling us, O Christians, how happy you should be! The Triune God is your Father. He is above all, and through all, and in you all. He has formally adopted you in Christ and given you His Holy Spirit into your hearts.

Now if God is the Father of all Christians, must we not acknowledge that we are as one family, and must we not truly love one another as brothers and sisters who pray to the same heavenly Father?

John therefore says in 1 John 5:1 that *everyone who loves [God] who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him*. God is your Father and the members of the Church are your brothers and sisters in Christ. The person who is not united in true Christian love with the true Christians is outside the pale of the Christian Church. Unity in love is the characteristic of the Christian Church.

May the Lord, then, grant us all, His grace that we endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, that we be one in the faith and keep the one true faith, and one in love, so that we never become weary in well-doing, and do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.² Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ John 3:16

² Gal 6:10