

Lake Cities Community Church
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What is Biblical Unity?
Ephesians 4:1-6

Over the past two weeks, during the Democrat and Republican National Conventions we have heard a lot about unity. The democrats were so divided in their primaries – they hoped the convention would bring much needed *party unity*. The Republican base going into their convention was not happy with the moderate John McCain – organizers, there too, hoped for unity. They hoped for unity and they preached unity. Barak Obama said: “We are not a collection of red states or blue states – we are the United States.” Great line. John McCain said: “Let's use the best ideas from both sides... I've worked with members of both parties. We are all God's children. We are all Americans.” Unity!

Great goals – but if we know anything about unity – we know how hard, how difficult it is to attain. Do you agree? Sometimes I think unity is a little bit like Sasquatch. Do you know who that is? Big Foot. The mythical creature some say is real. It exists – they say – and it is awesome! But go and look for it... and you will find it to be elusive and pictures of it to be fuzzy. Just last month two hunters in Northern Georgia said - “We have found Big Foot!” The press descended on the small town only to find a rubber ape costume in a bathtub. Many people desperately look for unity – only find false promises and disappointment.

Unity was certainly hard to find in the New Testament church. Open the Bible to almost any NT letter and you will find unity to be a dominant theme: Leaders were always calling the church to unity – and more often than not, they were disappointed with the result. Paul said to the

church at Corinth: **There are quarrels among you (1 Cor 1:11), I hear that divisions exist among you. (1 Cor 12:25).** He said to the church at Crete: **Shun foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes. (Titus 3:9).** James asked his congregation: **What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? (James 4:1).**

Unity is hard to find – it is one of the most difficult destinations for the church. And so it continues today. Churches are arguably more divided than at any other time in history. In the 12th edition of the book *Handbook of Denominations*, published in 2005, there now are 145 protestant denominations in the United States. That includes 31 different Baptist denominations and would you guess there are 11 different Mennonite denominations? Denominations split for various reasons and so do churches. In his article “Surviving an American Church Split” Michael Tummillo says: “Over 3800 American churches close their doors annually throughout the USA because of conflict – such as, real or perceived pastoral incompetency, strife, infidelity in leadership marriages, lack of financial integrity, doctrinal discrepancies, power struggles, etc.”

And so I ask, “Is biblical unity even possible? Or is it a theological Sasquatch – a nice idea - but one that most thinking people have given up on?” The answer is that from a human point of view – “No unity is not possible – it really isn’t. In our flesh we destroy and tear down.” But are not without hope – because the Bible says that what is impossible for us is possible with God. *Unity is possible* if God brings it about and if we cooperate with him in obedience. That is what this sermon series is all about - My prayer is that we at Lake Cities Community Church – might find true unity and bring glory to God.

Definition of Church Unity

In our quest for biblical unity, our goal today is simply to build a definition of unity from the Bible. And so, turn with me to Ephesians chapter four. [Eph. 4:1](#) **Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,** In the book of Ephesians, chapter four is a turning point in the book. In chapters one-three, Paul has laid out key doctrine and theology about Christ – and starting with chapter four He shows how that doctrine is lived out in daily life. In other words – we are commanded to live out our faith in a certain manner – not harshly, not with pride – **but with all humility and gentleness, patience, showing tolerance for one another in love (2).** And in all things – **“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace (3).”** There is so much disunity in the church because it is tragically very easy to live out that the Christian faith in a way that walks all over unity, even while the person thinks they are doing God’s will.

And so let’s start our definition by looking at that word unity. It is used both in verse three and down in verse 13 **“unity of the faith.”** How is unity defined? The Greek word is (ἑνότης - henates) has a basic meaning of: “State of oneness or being in harmony and accord” (BDAG, 338). A key word in that definition I want to look at is harmony. We are talking about unity and not uniformity. Harmony is the blending of different voices to make beautiful music. All singing the same note is uniformity – difference voices together is harmony that is the idea of church unity. One Greek scholar wrote about this word: “The unity of the church does not imply uniformity. It is organic unity. Within it there are differences between the rich and the poor, freemen and slaves. These are transcended but not removed... Indeed, the pneuma (Spirit) in whom the Church has its unity manifests Himself in a rich plurality of charismata (gifts).

(TDNT, Vol. 2. ε1ς, Stauffer, Kittle, 440-441). Paul said: **For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, (1 Cor 12:12).**

And so, at this point let us put the first part of our definition in place, **“Church unity is a state of harmony in a community of diverse people”** - It is different people working together in harmony in the church.

Work of the Holy Spirit

That is the first part of our definition, but more is needed. How do we create these harmonious sounds? Look back at our text. **Eph. 4:3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. The unity that we have with one another is “of the Spirit.” That means its originates or is authored by the Holy Spirit. Harold Hoehner, a commentator on the Book of Ephesians points out, “Nothing in this epistle suggests that unity is brought about by humans, only by the Holy Spirit.” Let’s continue on: **Eph. 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; Eph. 4:5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, Eph. 4:6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all**. In other words – our unity is authored by the Holy Spirit and grounded in the Trinity: One Spirit, One Lord, One Father. Three in one working the miracle of salvation. Do you remember last week’s message on Historic Christianity? Its back this week. Here we go – unity by the Spirit – unity in the foundational truth of our faith – the gospel itself.

Every Tuesday from about 11 – 2pm. I spend time with a group of pastors in Rowlett at our monthly lunch prayer meeting, called “Pray Rowlett.” It is not a large group – but for its size, there is much diversity. Regularly attending we have men and women. Ethnic backgrounds

include white, African American, and Indian. Denominations represented include Methodist, Nazarene, Baptist, Assembly of God, Pentecostal and Non-denominational. There are some large churches, medium and small churches; established churches and young churches. Both contemporary churches and traditional churches. In fact, there is a lot there that could divide us – but praise to God that what unites us is stronger than what divides us – and in Christ, in the gospel, in agreement on the Historic truths of the Christian faith we have unity with one another.

Let's build this into our definition – **Church unity is a state of harmony between diverse Christians - that originates from the Holy Spirit and belief in the triune God.**

Vigorously Preserved

Now that we have God's part – let's look at our part of the definition – go back again to verse three: **“being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Eph 4:3).** We are to be “diligent” to preserve unity (σπουδάζω). A definition of that Greek word is “To be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation, zealous/eager, take pains, make every effort” (BDAG 939). Why do we need such diligence? One of my professors at DTS, John Hannah said: “You have to have a little wisdom in negotiating the family of God. We all love the Lord, but we don't love each other.” In other words – you need diligence to keep unity in the church – not everyone is going to be your best friend – some people are going to rub you the wrong way – Be diligent?

And so, Paul commands the church to be, “without anger or disputing” (1 Tim 2:8 NIV). The Lord's servant must be “Patient when wronged” (II Tim 2:24 NASB). Paul said make sure you select elders are “not quarrelsome” (1 Tim 3:3) and too gently correct (1 Tim 2:25) Note the words we just read: Without Anger. Patient when wronged. Correct gently. Don't

quarrel. These are the type of characteristics needed in order to diligently preserve unity. You want to quarrel... but out of love you choose not to. You are wronged by someone in the church – and respond to patience and grace. You don't sweep things under the rug – but you respond with truth and love. *You are careful with your words.* Someone said, “Words is like snow; the softer it falls, the longer it dwells and the deeper it sinks into the mind (Coleridge). Let your advice in the church be like falling snow and not like driving rainstorm.

So let's build this onto our definition Church unity is a state of harmony in a community of diverse people... **...that originates from the Holy Spirit and belief in the triune God.... and must be diligently preserved.**

Carefully Restored

There is one more element I would like to add to our definition and it again focuses on our responsibility. Let me give it to you up front this time. Unity must be diligently preserved and **carefully restored, when broken.** Even though it originates from God, and even though we try diligently to preserve it – sometime unity is broken and when it is broken – it must be carefully restored. Let me take you to another church – the one in Philippi, where two women were fighting in the church – you will find the story at the beginning of Philippians chapter 4, verse two reads: **“I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord” (Phil 4:2 NASB).** Not only are the two women urged to restore unity, but also additional help is provided through a third person mediator; **“I say also to you, true companion, help them” (Phil 4:3 NET).** Paul does not explain the nature of this conflict, but he does urge timely restoration of fellowship. Also, Jesus said, **Matt. 5:23 “If therefore you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, Matt. 5:24 leave your offering**

there before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. Unity is not so much a destination, as it is a process – continual renewal and restoration. We come together – sin tears us apart, but we don't give up – we come back together again.

Summary of Church Unity

And so here is our final biblical definition of unity. Let's read it together: **“Church unity is a state of harmony in a community of diverse people that originates from the Holy Spirit and belief in the triune God; and must be diligently preserved and carefully restored, when broken.**

Application: In terms of application this morning – let me ask you three questions – (1) Are there any areas where you need to restore unity that has been broken? We have been a church almost 18 months – plenty of time for unresolved conflict to take root. Are there any areas God is prompting you to deal with? (2) How can you work diligently to preserve unity? This would involve valuing the diversity among us – getting to know those with different convictions than what you have. Don't always seek those who are “likeminded” but those who love the Lord in a different way – build bridges and build up unity. (3) How does your unique gifting add to the beautiful harmony at LCCC? If God has called you to LCCC, your gift and service are needed. God desires you to be in harmony with those around you in order to accomplish His purposes for the church. You are needed – along with other brothers and sisters. As the Psalmist (Ps 133:1) said – “How good and pleasant when brothers dwell together in unity.” Let's pray.