

## Christ the Cornerstone

Our Lord's prayer in 17 is the springboard into our study of unity.

*John 17:20-23*

*20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; 21 that they may all be one; even 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.*

*22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.*

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Jesus prayed for unity in the church – that we may all be one. He prayed that we may be one in the same way that He and His Father are one! This is supernatural.

He desires this unity so that the world may believe that the Father sent Him.

The epistles pick up where Jesus left off in John 17.

/ The book of Ephesians is our best guide to the unity of the church. \

Last Sunday we were in chapter 4, where we learned that the unity of the church is patterned after the unity of the Trinity.

/The Lord has established our unity. We don't create it. \

The Lord completed His mission. Then He sent the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit baptizes each believer into Christ. He places us into Christ. He identifies us with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection.

This is one of the Spirit's ongoing ministries for the church.

/First, the Lord Jesus Christ secured our unity – once and for all time. He died on the cross to reconcile us in His body. \

*Eph 2:11-16*

*11 Therefore remember that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision," which is performed in the flesh by human hands —*

*12 remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, 15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, 16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.*

He reconciled us by His blood.

/He reconciled us to Himself. He reconciled us to the Father. And He reconciled us to one another.\

Paul was addressing the Gentiles. At that time, a physical barrier - a middle wall - separated Gentiles and Jews at the Temple in Jerusalem.

/Known as the “soleg”, this partition prohibited Gentiles from entering into the temple courts. \

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/When Christ died, He broke down the barrier of the dividing wall. Not the physical barrier, but the religious barrier. \

The Gentiles were separated from Christ. They were without God. They had no hope.

*13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

/He made both groups – Jew and Gentile - into one New Man. He reconciled them both in one body to God through the cross.\

In the church, there is no Jew or (vs) Greek. There is no rich or poor. There is no slave or free.

*Gal 3:26-28*

*26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

We are all one in Christ. We have the same Father. We are brothers and sisters.

So let's recap.

/Jesus secured this unity for us when He died on the cross.\

Jesus reconciled us with one act of righteousness – His death on the cross. He made peace through the blood of His cross. This work is finished.

This was a one-time act; never to be repeated. It was perfect.

/On this ground - the blood of Christ, the Holy Spirit builds the body of Christ.... one new member at a time.\

So back in Ephesians 2 – Paul continued to address the Christian Gentiles.

*Eph 2:17-22*

*17 AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;*

/You who were far away – these were the Gentiles. Those who were near – these were the Jews.\

*18 for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father.*

Through Christ, both Jew and Gentile have our access in one Spirit to the Father.  
/Our unity ties into the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.\

*19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.*

/We, Jew and Gentile, are one family. We share one citizenship – a heavenly one\.

Paul uses the image of a building that is under construction.

/A new Temple is being built. It's a spiritual temple: the church.\

/Christ is the cornerstone of this temple. \

The cornerstone was the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation. All the other stones were laid in reference to the cornerstone.

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The cornerstone determined the position of the entire structure. It oriented the building in a specific direction.

If the cornerstone was mislaid, the entire building would be off.

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/Our cornerstone is Christ – the Rock!\His work is perfect, and all His ways are just.

*1 Peter 2:4-6*

*4 And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For this is contained in Scripture:*

*"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."*



The Holy Spirit is building this temple.

/ The Holy Spirit baptizes each and every believer in Christ into the body. That believer is placed into and permanently identified with Christ. \

*1 Cor 12:12-13*

*12 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, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

We who are many are one body in Christ.

We have many different ethnicities – but we are one body in Christ.

We come from many different backgrounds – but we are one body in Christ.

Some of us are rich, while others are poor – but we are one body in Christ.

Old and young, male and female, we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

/Out of the many, the Spirit makes one.\

And He places us in the body just as He wills.

/Each of us receives a manifestation of the Spirit – better known as a spiritual gift.\

*1 Cor 12:4-7*

*4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

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Varieties, and yet the same.

/Here the unity is expressed by the word “same”. \

The same Spirit. The same Lord (Jesus Christ). The same God (the Father).

This is supernatural work.

The same Spirit distributes the many varieties of gifts. The same Lord calls believers to a variety of ministries. The same Father is working all things in all persons.

/Out of the many, one.\

E pluribus unum. ( Marcus Tullius Cicero, 44 BC. “When each person loves the other as much as himself, it makes one out of many”)

With that, let's now head to Ephesians 4.

That's impossible:

Only the Lord has the blueprint! Our unity is supernatural!

When we examine the epistles, here's what we find:

/We are not called to create the unity of the Body of Christ, the church. But we ARE called to PRESERVE the unity of the body.\

Here is where our decisions and actions matter.

We are called to take actions to nurture the unity, guard the unity.

We are also warned not to do anything that could disrupt or undermine that unity.

/This morning, we are going to examine what the epistles have to say about what the Lord has done to establish our unity.\

Later on, we will learn how to preserve that unity. The epistles address both the positive and the negative commands that the Lord has given the church.

So we pick things up today in the book of Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 1.

*Eph 4:1-3*

*Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Notice in verse 3 that we are instructed to be diligent to preserve the unity. You can only preserve something that has already been created and established.

/Who established it? Verse 3 tells us: the Spirit. It's His unity.\

Let's take a look at the nature of this unity that God the Holy Spirit created for us.

/In verses 4-6, Paul identifies the seven essential elements of this unity. \

*Eph 4:4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also 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 over all and through all and in all.*

Paul's description highlights the supernatural character of our unity.

A brief scan of these seven elements reveals that this unity is supernatural in character.

/In fact, three of the seven elements are the three persons of the Godhead!!\

Read verses 4-6 again. One Spirit. One Lord. One Father.

/Then there are two elements that are linked with the Spirit. They are the one body, and the one hope of our calling.\

/Finally, two elements are linked with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.\

Now at this point you might find it odd that no other elements are linked with the Father. But there is a good reason for this.

/The Father is over all. He is sovereign over all things. \

He sent Jesus. Jesus submitted to the will of the Father.

/In this way, the Father is over the Lord Jesus Christ.\

And one day, after the Father has put all things in subjection under Christ's feet, the Son will be subjected to the Father – the One who subjected all things to Him. *1 Cor 15:22-28*

/The Father is also over the Holy Spirit\ . The Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ on a mission to redeem lost sinners. And then the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Spirit with the mission to establish the body of Christ.

/The Father is also through all. He operates through the Spirit who carries out His will on earth.\

/The Father is also in all. He is in Christ, and Christ is in us. \

*Eph 1:22-23*

*22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*

Let's continue with the two elements of our unity that are associated with the Spirit.

**One body:**

/The one body is the body of Christ. \



*Rom 12:4-5*

*4 For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*

/We saw in Ephesians 1:23 that the church is His body.\

/That unity of the one body is forged by baptism – the baptism by the Spirit. Each and every believer in Christ is baptized – placed into and permanently identified with – into Christ by means of the Holy Spirit.\ Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-13:

*1 Cor 12:12-13*

*12 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, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.*

/We have all been baptized into the one body of Christ – the church.\

I hope you are starting to see the tremendous interlinking between these different elements of our unity. For example, there is one body. It is the body of Christ. That body is formed by the baptism of the Spirit. We'll see more of this as we go along.

### **One hope of our calling:**

/The one hope of our calling is the resurrection of the body to life eternal when Christ appears for us. This is the hope of our inheritance laid up in heaven for us. \

As we close, let me show this to you in the epistles:

We begin in chapter 1 of Ephesians.

*Eph 1:18*

*18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,*

Of course it's no accident that we find Paul introducing these subjects - the body of Christ and the hope of our calling, in the first chapter of the book of Ephesians.

*Rom 8:23-25*

*23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. 24 For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.*

/Paul speaks of our hope, and identifies it as our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.\

*1 Thess 4:13-18*

*13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen*

*asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.*

Unlike the unbeliever, we have great hope.

/ At the coming of the Lord, when He descends from heaven with a shout, the dead in Christ shall rise. This is the resurrection of the body. \

Then we who are alive will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air.

/Our bodies will be transformed into bodies like His.\

John speaks of this hope too, in his first epistle:

*1 John 3:1-3*

*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not*

*appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. 3 And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

Thus we end today where we began, with the writings of John.

Next Sunday, we will examine the two elements of our unity which Paul associates here with the Lord Jesus Christ: one faith, and one baptism.

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/The nature of our union with Christ is that of mutual indwelling, John 17:21-23.\

We are in Christ, and Christ is in us.

/We are in Christ:\

*1 Cor 1:30-31*

*30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."*

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*Gal 3:27-28*

*27 For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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/And Christ is in us:\

*Col 1:25-27*

*25 Of this church I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, so that I might fully carry out the preaching of the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, 27 to whom God willed to*

*make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*

/And, as we saw in John 17:21-23, the purpose of this unity is to reveal the glory of Christ and the love of God to the world.\

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The church has a mission. It's given a calling and a purpose by God. The mission reflects that calling, that purpose. How do we fulfill our mission?

/We fulfill our mission being perfected in unity. This is our **corporate witness** to this lost and dying world. We are one body in Christ.\

/Glory is the demonstration of who God is. We reveal to the world what God is like by preserving the unity that He has established for us.\

The world will see our unity and know that God sent Jesus. They will observe our love for one another, and can learn about the love of God for them.

This is exactly what we find in Paul's admonition to the church in Rome:

*Rom 15:5-9*

*5 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*7 Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God. 8 For I say that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, 9 and for the Gentiles to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written,*

*"THEREFORE I WILL GIVE PRAISE TO YOU AMONG THE GENTILES,  
AND I WILL SING TO YOUR NAME."*

That leads to the next question, which is this:



/How do we preserve the unity of the body of Christ? Negatively, what things disrupt or undermine the unity of the brethren?\

Today I will sketch this out in broad terms. The epistles go into great detail.

/We begin with the negative. The deeds of the flesh create discord in the body.\

In Paul's day, the church at Corinth was nearly destroyed by this.

*1 Cor 1:10-12*

*10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 11 For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe's people, that there are quarrels among you. 12 Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."*

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And again:

*1 Cor 3:2-4*

*2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able,*

*3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men?*

Now for the positive.

/First, this unity is preserved by being of one mind , holding to the “one faith” – the word of God, the mind of Christ.\

*Phil 1:27*

*27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel;*

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/Second, the exercise of spiritual gifts strengthens the unity of the body.\

*1 Cor 12:4-7*

*4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.*

All the three members of Trinity contribute to the fruitful exercise of our gifts.

/Third, the lifeblood, the bond of our unity is the love of God, John 17:23.\

*Col 3:12-14*

*12 So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.*

/Fourth, the Lord's Supper is designed to express the unity of the body.\

Let's get ready now to celebrate the Lord's Supper.