

Equipping of the Saints

The Unity of the Faith

Introduction

We've been talking about equipping the saints, "for the work of service." Let's read two key passages to get us into the context of our lesson.

First, The Unity of the Faith

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV)

And [Jesus] Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some [shepherds (ESV)] and teachers, ¹² [to equip] the saints for the work of [service (NASB)], for [building up (ESV)] the body of Christ, ¹³ [until (ESV)] we all [attain (ESV)] to **the unity of the faith** and of **the knowledge of the Son of God**, to [become mature (NIV)], to the [whole measure (NIV)] of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful [schemes (ESV)], ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, [we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, (ESV)] ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and [held (ESV)] together by what every joint supplies, [when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (ESV)]

It is interesting how sermons develop. I have to tell you I'm having difficulty lately coming up with a lesson. Not that I can't find topics or don't know, generally speaking, where I want to go in my studies. But I'm having difficulty with how I want to present the material or in deciding which material to present when. Or how to express the ideas I'm trying to convey. We usually have four full weeks with three intervening Sundays to prepare our sermons and I'm stymied usually up until the Friday before my sermon is due. I'll have pages of notes but no sermon until "just-in-time" for Sunday morning. And then, when something of a sermon does begin to show itself, many times there are ideas that pop up that weren't there and wouldn't be in the sermon if it had developed faster or sooner.

For example, originally in my sermon, after reading Ephesians 4:11-16, I wanted to emphasize the point that this equipping of the saints will continue until we all attain to two things, 1) the unity of the faith and 2) the knowledge of the Son of God to become mature. And then I was going to move on. However, on Friday I was going over Del Tackett's, "The Truth Project," (which is where we're headed for what to build on top of the foundation of Christ that we have been given) and I was reminded in Del's 8th tour (what he calls his lessons,... tours) about the "Mystery of Unity," or as he says in Latin, "Unio Mystica." It got me thinking about that phrase we just read in Ephesians... "until we all attain to the unity of the faith." Because it appears, what he calls, "the mystery of unity" fits the description of "the unity of the faith."

I'd like to share some of that thinking today...

The Mystery of Unity

Beginning with THE COMMON VIEW OF THE UNITY OF THE FAITH

If you remember from my AM lesson on April 7th this year regarding the unity of the faith, I quoted Henry Halley from his Bible handbook where he applied Paul talking about the oneness found Ephesians 4:1-6 against denominationalism in Christianity.

Henry says...

"The church is nearly 2,000 years old, and, in this respect, is still in its childhood state. It has not yet, in its visible manifestation as a whole, known Unity. Paul's unceasing fight was against factional elements in local churches and the Jew-Gentile dissension. Then came the bitter controversies of the 2nd to 4th centuries. Then the Imperial Church, with its outward semblance of Unity under State authority, but poisonous blight of its spiritual life. Then the Papal Hierarchy with its Unity of Authority that robbed men of their rights of conscience and drove the Bible out of circulation.

"Then, 400 years ago, the Protestant break for freedom [occurred]. Naturally, when men began again to think for themselves, after the long night of Papal bondage, they would see things somewhat differently; and it was inevitable that the Protestant Movement would go down the years in different streams. So we still have a Divided Christendom. Whether there will ever, in this world, be an outward organic Unity of the Visible Church, we do not know. The selfishness and pride of men are against it. But there always have been, and still is, a Unity in the Invisible Church, of God's true saints, which, somehow, sometime, somewhere, will come to full fruition, in answer to Christ's own prayer (in John 17), and manifest itself as the full grown body of Christ."

And this makes sense. Surely there is only one faith, Paul says so (Ephesians 4:5).

In the church of Christ Gospel Advocate commentary on Ephesians, David Lipscomb & JW Shepherd also make application to Ephesians 4:1-6 for local member unity & against division (I think of church splits here) and also against denominational division. Let me read the passage before quoting their commentary.

Ephesians 4:1-6 (ESV), Paul says

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call[ing]—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Following verse 6, David Lipscomb & JW Shepherd say:

*The Creator, Preserver and Benefactor of all things, who overrules in, [and] through the universe, and dwells and works in every obedient heart "both to will and to work, for his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13.) This perfect and complete unity in the creation, preservation, and direction of the universe and of all the loyal and true subjects of God is given as the strong and irresistible appeal for unity among the children of God, in his body, guided by his Spirit. **It is not a plea for denominational union.** There were no denominations in the days of Paul. It is an earnest plea for unity and oneness in the congregation of believers in Christ is given locally in doing the work of*

God on earth. It is a grievous sin against God for men to destroy the unity of the body of Christ by personal ambition and strife and bickering.

And I agree, there needs to be a unity among the members of the body of Christ. There should be no division among us and certainly no denominational division in the church.

BUT, THERE IS ANOTHER UNITY,

another union to consider that the scriptures speak about that is equally applicable to this "unity of the faith."

This other union, we will see, is represented by the union of a husband and wife. That relationship between a husband and wife is a type of another relationship that is the antitype. And it is this antitype that can be said to be: "the unity of the faith."

Ephesians 5:22-32 (ESV)

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

In this scripture we can see that the husband is a type, a foreshadow of Christ, Christ being the antitype of-, or the reality foreshadowed by- the husband, and the wife is a type, that foreshadows the church, the church being the antitype, the reality depicted by the wife.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body.

The husband/wife relationship prefigures and foreshadows the relationship that Christ has with His church. As proof of this Paul quotes Jesus in Matthew 19:5 who Himself quotes the law of marriage found in Genesis 2:24

³¹ *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

Paul then calls the union of a husband and wife a mystery. "The two shall become one flesh", he says...

³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that **it refers to Christ and the church.**

Paul tells us that, in fact, he's really not talking about the husband and wife relationship. The whole point of the type is to show the IMPORTANCE of the antitype, that is here, the relationship between Christ and the church!

So, if the union of the husband and wife is "one flesh," what is the union of Christ and His church?

We find the answer to that question from Paul reasoning with the Corinthians for why Christians should not participate with temple prostitutes. Picking up in the second part of verse 13 in 1 Corinthians chapter 6. Paul says,...

1 Corinthians 6:13b-20 (NIV)

*The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that **your bodies are members of Christ himself?***

When we see the word "member" here I think we have a tendency to view it like a "membership." Like a membership in an organization, you know, like Sam's Club. I'm a Sam's Club member. But that's not how Paul is using the word here. He's saying the word member as a part of a body, like a body part, as he says in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, a foot or an eye, an ear, and so on..., those kinds of members, body parts.

So in order to get the import of what he's saying here, and I know it may sound a little crass but it's important, I'm going to substitute for the word "member" with the phrase "body part." Because that's how he originally used it.

*¹⁵ Do you not know that **your bodies are body parts of Christ himself?** Shall I then take the [body parts] of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that **he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body?** For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."*

There's that mystery again, "The two will become one flesh." Even in an unauthorized union.

BTW, This is also why ALL unauthorized unions are sin, they are ALL wrong. Why? Because they do not properly foreshadow or depict the relationship, the union Christ has with His church! The husband/wife union was DESIGNED by God to depict the union of His Son with His church... the bride of Christ!

¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

There it is! This is the mysterious union. The union of God and the believer. The foreshadow was a union of flesh, "the two shall become one flesh." The reality depicted is God, the Son united with man, the believer, His creation. We could say, "the two will become one spirit." Paul says it this way: we are "one with Him in spirit." Paul continues in verse 19.

*¹⁹ Do you not know that **your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?***

And here is the tie in to the context of our study in equipping the saints. We are learning what we are supposed to build on the foundation of Christ that's been given to us. Paul will say in Ephesians chapter two that we are being built into a holy temple.

The Holy Spirit lives in us! He is in us! The mysterious union, If we belong to Christ. So Paul reminds them...

You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

THERE IS YET ANOTHER WAY THAT WE ARE UNITED WITH CHRIST.

When we are baptized into his death and resurrection we are united with him in his death and resurrection. Speaking about baptism, Paul says,

Romans 6:5 (ESV) *For if we have been **united with him in a death** like his, we shall certainly **be united with him in a resurrection** like his.*

In fact, it's through baptism that we are united with the Holy Spirit. He is the gift we receive:

Acts 2:38 (NIV) *Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

And the gift of the Holy Spirit there IS the Holy Spirit as we have seen that He is IN Christians.

So, when we submit ourselves to and obey Christ we are not only redeemed and saved, but we also gain an intimate relationship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. So intimate that they live within their temple, not made with human hands, but within the temple they made... our bodies. They live within us.

In Satan's tempting of Adam and Eve to disobey God, do you remember what he said? He promised them that by rejecting God's truth claim, "you will be like God." Doesn't that temptation pale compared to what God actually does for those who obey and submit to His will?

THE UNION OF GOD AND THE BELIEVER

Doesn't this better fit the idea: "*until we ALL attain to the unity of the faith,*" in the context of equipping the saints, than we shouldn't be splitting churches or making denominations, that kind of unity? We should all attain to obeying and submitting to Him who is the husband of the church!

Which brings us to:...

Our Second contextual scripture passage

Where Paul is referencing the building metaphor in...

Ephesians 2:17-22 (ESV)

*And [Jesus] came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.¹⁸ For through him we both **have access in one Spirit to the Father.**¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but **you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,**²⁰ **built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,**²¹ **in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.**²² **In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.***

A HOLY TEMPLE, A DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD BY THE SPIRIT

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:11, "*... no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*"

We need to discover that foundation and establish it and once we've done that, what do we do? It seems Paul expected someone else to build on it. He says in 1 Corinthians 3:10, "*... I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it*"

The question is: what do we build on it? In light of the unity of the faith, our union with Jesus Christ, how about **a holy temple, a dwelling place for God by the Spirit?**... What could be more fitting than for God's creation to submit and obey to our Lord and become a place where God could live with us through the Spirit? We will investigate building holy temples the next Sunday morning I preach.

Here's a closing thought: Do you think that the mansion God is preparing for us in heaven has anything to do with what kind of temple we build for him in us here on earth?... What do you think?