

The Unity Of The Christian Church.

Text: Eph 4:1-6

Suggested Hymns:
194, 208, 355, 191, 189

- 1) There Is Unity In The Whole Church Invisible
- 2) Sadly, There Is Not Unity In The Whole Church Visible

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, *¹I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ²with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one 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,

In December, 1931, the Pope published a letter inviting Protestants to return to the one fold, stressing particularly the wonderful privilege offered in his Church to venerate the Virgin Mary. He had extended the same invitation many times before, but always without being accepted by the Protestants.

We regard such an invitation as ridiculous, as ridiculous as it would be if a crocodile, swimming in murky waters with a gaping mouth, said to children playing on the shore, *“Come on in; the water is fine.”*

We marvel at the audacity of the proposal for such unity, coming, as it does, from one who has done more to disrupt the Church than any other agency on earth.

However, times have changed, and not all Lutherans think as we do, basing their life on Scripture. In 1999 many Lutheran churches around the world, including the largest Lutheran Church in Australia, signed the Joint Declaration

with the Roman Catholic Church. This wordy document links works to salvation, contrary to Scripture which says in Ephesians 2:8-9, ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.*

Also from other sources besides the Papacy the cry goes up for the union of all Christendom. We, too, sigh for unity, but the unity which we desire and insist upon is not a mere union, just for the sake of being one, not to agree to disagree, but a real unity in all of the doctrine of Holy Scripture.

This is the type of unity which bound together the early Christians, of whom we read in Acts 2:42, ⁴² *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.* And also in Acts 4:32, ³² *Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.*

The hymnist expresses this unity with the words,¹

Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.

Divisions and dissensions among Christians are most deplorable. It is truly sad that the Church of Christ should be like that.

The hymnist writes,²

Men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder,
By heresies distressed.

Our text for today, which is also the Epistle Lesson, presents the opportunity to speak of *The Unity of the Christian Church*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. There Is Unity In The Whole Church Invisible

There is unity in the whole Church Invisible. The holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, is one. It is composed of all true believers, and only of these.

All who have the saving faith in Jesus Christ, all who have been, and truly are, converted, all whom the Holy Spirit has called by the Gospel, enlightened with His gifts, sanctified and kept in the one true faith, are members of the one holy Christian Church. Outside of the Holy Christian Church no one is saved.

The tie that binds Christians together and binds them to Christ is faith. Scripture says in Galatians 3:26 that *you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Paul speaks of this unity of the Church in our text. He calls it *“the unity of the Spirit”* and says 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.*

Let us look a little closer at these words.

“The unity of the Spirit.” It is the Spirit of God, - the Holy Spirit, who effects this unity. It is He who calls, gathers, and enlightens the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. He works faith in the hearts of people through the Word.

“There is one body.” This is not a physical body, but a spiritual body; and of this body all true believers are members and consequently closely connected and joined together.

The hymnist writes,³

We are not divided;
All one body we,
One in hope and doctrine,
One in charity:

And of this spiritual body Christ is the Head.

“There is one ... Spirit,” the Holy Spirit, who is the soul of this body, the life of it.

And the Church is one in hope, as Paul says in our text, *just as you were called in one hope of your calling.* Christians are called to the same hope, the hope of eternal salvation.

The hymnist expresses this joy this way,⁴

One is our calling, one our name,

The end of all our hopes the same:
A crown of life with Thee.

The Church has also ***“one Lord.”*** That is Jesus Christ, who redeemed us to God by His blood.

“One faith,” faith in Christ, our Redeemer.

“One Baptism,” the Baptism by water and the Word, instituted by Christ.

“And there is one God and Father of all,” the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.⁵

And the one God and Father of all is ***“above all and through all and in you all.”***

Certainly, then, forming one body, having one Spirit and one hope, one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, the whole Christian Church is one. There is unity in the whole Church Invisible.

True Christians the world over may not be one in dress, customs, nationality, language, culture, rank, they may not live in close proximity, they may not be one externally and visibly, they may differ widely in many respects, but inwardly and spiritually they are all united by the closest bonds conceivable.

It is of this gloriously united Church that we sing,⁶

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word:
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,

Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

This is a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish.

May we be and remain members of this Church, the Church Invisible, invisible because no one can look into another person's heart to see whether or not he really believes; but the Lord knows those who are His.⁷ There is unity in the whole Church Invisible.

2. Sadly, There Is Not Unity In The Whole Church Visible.

This is the second part of our consideration. The external disunion which is so apparent is inconsistent with the internal unity. It is not only inconsistent, but deplorable. It is an unspeakably sad condition. It is contrary to the will of God.

God also wants His visible Church united. Christ prayed for the unity of the Church saying in John 17:20-21 ²⁰ ***"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.***

The Apostle Paul lifted up his voice for unity. In our text he implores the Christians at Ephesus to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

God says through the same apostle in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13, ¹⁰ ***Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.***

¹¹ ***For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. ¹² Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?***

Then there is the stern warning in Galatians 5:15, ¹⁵ ***But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!***

That there are many sects and denominations in the visible Church is not in accord with the will of God.

Why are there divisions in the Christian Church? One reason is that the visible Church is composed not only of true believers but also hypocrites. Remember the Parable of the tares among the wheat. We read in Matthew 13:24-30, *“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ “but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ²⁶ “But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared.*

²⁷ *“So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ ²⁸ “He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’*

²⁹ *“But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ ‘Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”*

Likewise the parable of the dragnet. We read in Matthew 13:47-50, ⁴⁷ *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, ⁴⁸ “which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ⁴⁹ “So it will be at the end of the world. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, ⁵⁰ “and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”*

Another reason is given in the first part of our text. 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.*

Transposing the thought, we may say that the unity of the Spirit is broken when Christians do not walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called,

with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.

The unity is disturbed because some do not walk worthy of their important calling. They forget that they are Christians, promising to follow⁸ and obey the Lord in everything.

The Roman Catholic Church is separated from us because it flagrantly disobeys the Lord in a hundred and one ways. Other churches are separated from us because in this or that point they teach contrary to the Word of Christ.

Disobedience to the Lord disturbs the unity and the peace of a congregation. When members fail to walk worthy of their calling as Christians, they are stirring up trouble, and the unity is marred. If all Christians would submit to the sole authority of Jesus Christ, be guided by His Word alone, and follow His example and precepts, there would be unity also in the visible Church.

The peace is disturbed by pride, impatience, and enmity. Christians should be lowly, humble, and meek, willing to suffer wrong than to do wrong. They should have patience with the infirmities of their brethren, let love rule, put the best construction on everything, and be kind and affectionate one to another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another.

Where these Christian precepts are not heeded, there is strife, dissension, contention, discord, disharmony, and disunion.

This side of heaven we can never hope to unite all of Christendom. However, the unity that is there we must endeavour to keep. Our part is to walk worthy, as our text says, *walk worthy of the calling with which you were called*.

And our part is to study God's Word and to preach it in its truth and purity. In short, our duty is to follow Christ in doctrine and in life, and it is our joy to look forward to the end of all strife.

The singing Church sings,⁹

Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious

Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great Church victorious
Shall be the Church at rest. Amen.

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

¹ Hymn 797

² Hymn 191

³ Hymn 208

⁴ Hymn 355

⁵ Ephesians 3:14-15

⁶ Hymn 191

⁷ 2 Timothy 2:19

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:14

⁹ Hymn 191 v 4