

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 4:5-6 - Why We Should Be Unified - Part 3

I went for a long drive this week with one of my kids through the mountains and as we were driving it became apparent that some of the views were pretty amazing. Along the way we pulled out to one place in particular and just looked out over the mountain scenery to take it all in because it's just fantastic.

I say that as something of an illustration for why we occasionally slow way down and work through a section slowly. All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable. All of it is good and true and right. But occasionally we need to slow down and stare at the theological mountains for a little bit. And that's what we've been doing the last few weeks.

We've slowed way down to look at these massive truths Paul gives us about being one. Being unified as Christians. And I've said this several times, but unity is a big deal to God. That's what this section in Ephesians is about. It's foundational truths for why the Church is to be unified. **Turn to John 17** for a moment.

This is the night before Jesus died. We call this whole chapter in John the High Priestly prayer because this is Jesus's prayer on behalf of his followers. He's our high priest and he's praying for us. He's not praying for the world. He's not praying for those who will never come to faith. He's praying for his disciples and all who come to faith through the gospel. And this section is filled with amazing truths. And it's filled with the heart of Jesus towards his followers as he's about to be crucified. **Read 22**

Jesus says he's given us his glory. What is that? It's the glorious truth about who he is. It's that he's the God-Man Messiah. That truth wasn't revealed to everyone. But it was revealed to his disciples. Why did he do that? Why did he reveal that to us? So that we'd be one.

One just like Jesus and the Father are one. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that that's pretty close. Whatever unity exists in the Triune Godhead Jesus wants to be reflected in the Church amongst believers.

Imagine you were going to die and you had a few last things you were going to pray about before you died, what would you pray for? Well, here at the end Jesus prays for us to be unified. **Read 23**

This is incredible. Our unity as Christians shows the reality that the Father loves us as much as he loves the Son. Stop there for a second. I think we'd all agree that the Father loves the Son. But do you realize that if you are in Christ, a believer, he loves you as much as he loves the Son?

The supernova of love that the Father has toward the Son, he has toward every single person who is a Christian. There's not less love or more love. God only loves his people in the infinite fullness of who he is.

And Jesus says there's a way we can actually demonstrate to the world that the Father loves us infinitely. You know how that is? When we're unified. **Read 23**

This is what Jesus is pleading with to the Father just hours before he is crucified. Make them one.

Turn to Psalm 133. This is a song of ascents. There are 15 songs of ascent in the psalms. **Psalms 120-134.** And the tradition was that the Jews recited one for each of the 15 steps on the way up to the Temple. You were ascending up the Temple so you read a psalm for each step you took.

So this psalm is given as the Jews would be on pilgrimage to the Temple for one of the feasts. Just as they almost got to the top, they were reminded that what God wanted here at the Temple when all his people were gathered together was unity. **Read 1-3**

Isn't it good when people dwell in unity? I remember when I was a kid my parents would go batty when my sister and I argued with each other. You know what happens when my kids argue with each other? I go batty. It's like Banner to Hulk in 2 seconds 'Just be nice!' Life is just so much more pleasant when people dwell in unity.

It's like oil running down on Aaron's beard. Aaron and his family were the high priests. So to pour oil on him was to anoint the new high priest. It was a time of gladness and worship and sacrifice and festival.

When we're unified and loving it's like a massive religious festival in OT times.

Or it's like Mt Hermon covered with dew. Israel is dry and so any moisture on Mt Hermon in the far north is a huge blessing. When we were in Israel we were going to go visit a couple of sites around Mt Hermon but it had snowed the night before. And there was a traffic jam for miles as people drove for hours to go skiing on Mt Hermon. Snow on Mt Hermon has always been a massive blessing in the eyes of those who live there.

When there's unity and peace it's blessing and life. **Read 3**

So I slow down to look at this section because this is so near and dear to the heart of God. Back in **Eph. 4** we've seen 5 foundations of unity so far.

We are part of one body, the body of Christ. You and me and every Christian in every age around the world is part of one body of Christ. While we may have different roles but we're all essential to the body.

We are also filled with the one Holy Spirit. He saved us and equipped us for the exact service he wants from us. And whatever gift we have from him is to serve the other members of the body.

Every Christian has one hope. That's the coming of Jesus when he will raise our bodies from the grave and bring in the New Heavens and New Earth. Every Christian since the dawn of time is looking forward to the return of Jesus. When all else fails and we're struggling to be unified know that on the last day we will be unified. So we might as well strive for it now.

There's one Lord - the Lord Jesus. We have to define who he is correctly, and follow him personally, and there are no others. But every Christian is a slave of the one Lord.

And there's one faith. Not subjective faith, but the objective set of doctrine that we all believe when we become a Christian. This is why since the church's earliest days there have been creeds and confessions - because we want to ensure those around us believe the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints as Jude says.

We may disagree on secondary doctrines or tertiary doctrines. But we're unified in the fundamentals.

This morning we look at the last 2. One baptism and One God and Father.

1) So let's look at Baptism. Baptism is also a foundation for unity.

Why is baptism such a big deal in the life of the church? Because this is how someone is identified as a Christian. Throughout the history of the Church the way a person says "I'm a Christian, I want to follow Jesus, I've believed in the gospel and repented from my sins" is by being baptized.

Baptism does not save you. We reject baptismal regeneration that teaches that baptism is the means of salvation. They believe that people are saved by grace through baptism.

The Bible teaches salvation is by grace through what? Faith. Faith alone.

Even Peter makes that clear in a somewhat startling statement in **1 Pet 3:21**: baptism which corresponds to this [the flood] now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

What's he saying? He's saying it's not the actual liquid of water that saves someone in the water of baptism. It's what baptism is doing. Biblically speaking, when someone believes in Jesus the way they cry out to him for salvation is through baptism. Baptism becomes something of a prayer response or appeal to God for salvation.

That might sound weird because here in America especially we've strayed so far from that. But what we see in the Bible is that when someone believes in the gospel the way they show it and the way they cry out to God is not to raise their hand or walk an aisle. It's not to fill out a card or start wearing Jesus T-Shirts.

The way people in the Bible show they are crying out to God to save them is through the waters of baptism.

In **Acts 2** Peter is preaching the gospel on Pentecost explaining how the Jews crucified Jesus but he rose again and now he is Lord of all the earth. The people all say "Okay, now what do we do about that?" Peter says repent and be baptized.

You believe this message? Show it by getting dunked. 3,000 people believed that day. How do we know? Because 3,000 people were baptized that day. And the apostles actually used huge baptismal pools in the Temple to do this. Did the baptism save them? No. How did they cry out to God? Through baptism.

Let me put it a different way. How many of you prayed some kind of prayer to God when you were saved? "Jesus forgive me, Jesus save me?" Something like that. Did praying save you? No. What saved you? God's grace through faith expressed in a prayer.

In the same way, baptism doesn't save anyone but it is the public expression of someone's faith in Jesus.

Peter heals a lame beggar a couple chapters later and a couple more thousand believe. How do we know? They're baptized.

Everywhere Peter and later Paul go the pattern is the same, when someone believes they get baptized. This pattern is so strong throughout the NT that Paul even refers to Christians as those who have been baptized. Baptism becomes short hand to say someone is a Christian.

Why baptism? Well, there was a type baptism among Jews before John the Baptist came on the scene. Some religious groups used it as a rite of passage for newcomers. But best we can tell it was all self-administered. The person baptized themself.

John the Baptist was different. He was the authority, the divinely appointed person who regulated who was baptized. Part of this was so he could discern who was really repentant or not. Pharisees came and John seems to turn them away. They're a brood of vipers. So he's a gatekeeper of sorts.

But John was also sent to identify the Messiah. Remember when Jesus came to be baptized it was just John and Jesus who saw the Holy Spirit come down out of heaven like a dove and land on Jesus. John's baptism was partly to ready Israel for the Messiah, and partly to identify who the Messiah actually was.

Our baptism is to identify with Jesus. Paul says in **Romans 6** that when we go into the water it's a picture of death. We're united with Jesus in his death. And when we come up it's that we're united with him in his resurrection. It's a beautiful picture of the death and resurrection of Jesus which now defines the life of a believer. **Turn to Matt 28:16-20**

So baptism is a sign of faith and repentance, a picture of identifying with Jesus.

Baptism is also commanded. It's part of the discipleship process that we are called to do to all nations. **Read 16-20**

So we go make disciples. How? By baptizing them in the name of Father Son and Spirit. And by teaching them all that Jesus commanded. This is our mission.

And I would be remiss if I didn't mention that if you believe in the Lord Jesus for your salvation you need to be baptized. It is a command from the Lord. But it's also the way the church knows that you are part of the Kingdom. The Bible has no category for people who call themselves Christians and are not baptized.

I became a Christian when I was 14 and even though I went to a baptist church no one told me that Christians need to get baptized. It wasn't until 2 years later that I was baptized when my friend wrote me a letter saying I need to get baptized. And it's hard, you're in front of people, you're nervous. But there's nothing to be afraid of. The body of Christ loves seeing people come into the body of Christ.

You ever seen people get a heart transplant or a kidney transplant? They're excited to have this new organ be part of their body. It gives them life. New believers are the life and legacy of the church.

By the way, I feel the need to stop and mention infant baptism for a moment. I believe that infant baptism is completely illegitimate. It is not baptism. It is babies getting wet and cute pictures being taken, but it is not baptism. And it's not for several reasons.

First, there is no command in the NT or even any example of infant baptism. It's just not there. Only those who profess faith in Jesus are ever commanded or described as being baptized.

Our presbyterian friends might say that households were baptized and therefore babies must have been baptized as well. The problem is that assumes too much. Many households don't have infants - even in our church. And even if they do, infants aren't always included when speaking of the household. If our family goes and eats hamburgers with someone's family it doesn't mean that even the infants are eating hamburgers. That stretches language too much.

Second, the sign of baptism is for those who are in the New Covenant. The way a person comes into the New Covenant is through faith alone in Jesus alone. Infants don't have saving faith so they are not part of the New Covenant and therefore should not receive the sign of the New Covenant. It confuses the covenants and confuses the sign of the covenants.

Our Presbyterian friends might say "But David believed at his mother's breasts." That's from **Psalm 22:9**

The rest of the psalm says that "from my mother's womb you have been my God." The point isn't that when he was 2 days old he repented from his sin and believed in the gospel. The point is that God had chosen David, like he chose Jeremiah, for service. And really the psalm is a Messianic psalm talking about Jesus.

There's a lot about David's life and Jesus's life that is not true of our lives.

They'll also say that "Children of believers are holy according to **1 Cor. 7**." Paul does say that about the unbelieving children and spouses of Christians. And his point is that when someone comes to faith in Jesus it's still okay for them to be married to an unbelieving wife and be intimate with her. And their children aren't illegitimate.

In the OC children born between pagans and the people of God were illegitimate. Not so in the NC. There is a sense in which a believer does have a sanctifying effect on their household.

But that doesn't mean we go baptizing all the babies. I mean, we wouldn't just go baptize the unbelieving spouses, why would we baptize the babies?

But Peter says "The promise if for you and for your children!" Presbyterians believe that New Covenant promises automatically flow to their children. "See, children of believers automatically inherit covenant blessings so they should be baptized." No they don't. They only inherit covenant blessings through faith in Jesus. Even even in the OC children didn't automatically inherit covenant blessings. Jacob I loved but Esau I what? Hated. They were twins.

Peter says that the promise of salvation is "for you and your children and all those who are far off and for everyone who God calls to himself." There has to be evidence that God has called a person to himself before being baptized.

I think one of the absolute best sermons John MacArthur ever preached was called the Baptism Debate between he and RC Sproul. Each got to preach one sermon to convince the hearers. And they're preaching at RC's church in front of a bunch of Presbyterians. And MacArthur's sermon is devastating to infant baptism. And if you listen to MacArthur you have to listen to Sproul's sermon as well. Because the premier Presbyterian theologian of the 20th century gives the worst defense I've ever heard for infant baptism. He basically summarizes it by saying "the NT doesn't forbid it."

Well, the NT doesn't forbid fog machines and lasers and Santa Claus either, but we don't do that either.

What I think parents ought to do is disciple their children in the Lord, be faithful to teach them the gospel, teach them the Bible, teach them what it means to follow Jesus. And when the child asks about baptism then we can talk about that.

Our goal is never to hinder our kids from coming to Jesus or obeying. But we want to ensure they are truly members of the New Covenant through credible faith before they go through the initial rite of the Church.

The word baptize is the Greek word baptizo which means to dunk, It means to plunge something under something else. That's why the apostles used baptismal pools, that's why John and Jesus went to places in the Jordan where the water was plentiful. Jesus **came up out** of the water. Ancient documents like the Didache say that if there isn't water deep enough to plunge, then pour buckets over their heart. Not sprinkle, not intinction where you draw a little symbol. Dunk. Like Oreos in milk. All the way in.

You fully go down into death and you fully rise into new life.

When people ask me "Well, I was baptized as an infant, is that enough." My response is that they got wet as an infant, but they were not baptized. Baptism is an act of obedience by those who are redeemed to identify with the Lord. Babies can't do that.

"But they circumcised infants in the OC!" They sure did. But which covenant are we in? We're in the New Covenant where you don't have to tell anyone "know the Lord" why? Because everyone in the NC already knows the Lord.

This is important for unity. There is only one baptism. It's the thing that marks us as Christians.

In fact, if you want to build immediate connection with another Christian just ask them about their baptism. "Hey tell me about when you were baptized." I've asked that many times over the years. I think every time I do the person lights up. This was a turning point in their life, it was a testimony of the Lord's faithfulness in saving them. Sometimes there's crazy stories, other times it's pretty vanilla.

But one thing every Christian has in common: they were baptized.

Last foundation of unity is back in **Ephesians 4:5**

2) There is one God our Father. **Read 6**

We've seen one Spirit, one Lord, and so it makes sense that there is one God and Father. When Paul says God and Father he doesn't mean two different people. He means the same person.

A lot of times Paul refers to the Father simply as God. Or God our Father. Jesus is also fully God, and the Spirit is fully God. But in passing reference Paul will simply call the person of the Father "God."

Here, he's just talking about God the Father here. And I want to make just 2 quick observations here that apply to every believer: God is personal and God is powerful.

God is personal. He is our Father. All throughout the Bible we see that God is a father to his people. He loves them like a father loves his children.

Prov. 3:11-12: my son do not despise the Lord's discipline nor be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves like a father the son in whom he delights.

Even when God disciplines us we learn it's because God delights in us like a good Father.

Matt. 6:9-15: Pray then like this: Our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be your name.

When we come to God in prayer imagine you're going to your dad. How do you talk to your dad? If you're dad isn't great, forget him and think about the best dad you know of. And then realize that God is much better than that.

Our Father. Not just my Father, but your Father, and every Christian's Father. We're in the same family, same household. And if I've got a problem with this person over here I need to remember that we're brothers and we'll all give an account to the same Father.

Sometimes my kids get into squabbles with the neighbors. So I bring them all together and we work it out. But how I talk to my kids and treat my kids is different than how I talk to my neighborhood kids. Why? Because I'm not their Father.

God is the Father of all. Not of every last person. He's only Father in truth to those who believe.

So if God is my Father and God is your Father that's going to change the dynamic of our relationship with each other. That's going to change how we treat each other.

So God the Father is personal. God is also powerful. **Read 6**

God is over all - he's in charge of all creation. He's on his sovereign throne exalted above the heavens. We say that God is transcendent. He transcends - he's above and over - all of his creation. He is so far better and beyond his creation it's hard to imagine.

The heavens are his throne and the earth is his what? Footstool.

He's above it. But he's also here in the middle of it all. He's through it and in it.

Not in a weird eastern mysticism way like God is the chair or God is the carpet. No, this is just the way to say that God is omnipresent. Here's everywhere present. He knows what's happening in all of his creation. He's here with us now as we worship him. He's with our Christian friends around the world.

God wants unity in his church. The mystery of the gospel is that we are all one in Christ, but we need these foundational truths to make that unity happen. May we do so to his glory.

Pray

Benediction:

Jude 24-25: Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.