

Jason Upchurch - Ephesians 4:4-4 - Why We Should Be Unified - Part 2

This morning we return to our look at unity within the Church. Unity within the church is one of the hardest things to achieve and at the same time it also of the highest importance in the mind of Jesus.

It's hard to achieve - whether within a single church or just being unified with other Christians who aren't even in our church. There's sin, there's personalities, preferences, culture, error.

I was reading a book this week that was recommended by 2 pastor friends. And finally I just gave up. I couldn't take it any more. Bad theology mixed in with speculation and sensationalizing stories. I just couldn't do it. I'm sure the author is a believer but the book just kept grinding on me.

That happens in real life as well. Jesus wants his church to be unified.

Unity within the Church is one of chief testimonies that God is working. When you have a group of people from all different backgrounds, preferences, families, come to faith in Jesus the natural thing to do is have superficial relationships that have no depth. No love, no service, to unity. We're like Seahawks fans - we wear hats, wear shirts, cheer at the right time but then go our separate ways.

But that's not how God has designed the church. He wants us to love one another deeply even though we are very different. He wants us to serve one another sacrificially, because he sacrificed for us.

But that takes more than Hallmark card sayings. That takes deep truths that guide us when it's hard. How do Jews and Gentiles worship Jesus together? How do slave and free? How do we? We've got a lot of differences here - what truths bind us together?

Paul gives us 7 truths here that all begin with the word "one." We're all these different parts but we all come together as one. Last week we saw we're one body. There's only one body of Christ. And if someone is a believer in the Lord Jesus, then they are part of the body. Maybe you're a nose, maybe you're an eye, maybe you're an armpit. We've all got a different place in the body but we're all one body.

We also saw there is only one Spirit. The Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who saves us, seals us, gives us spiritual gifts, helps us understand his word, makes us into a Temple, and uses us to sanctify others by speaking his truth to them.

And there's only one Spirit. The same Spirit that is in me is in you and the brothers in Africa and Asia. It's the same Spirit that was in Martin Luther and Charles Spurgeon and the apostle John and apostle Paul and is in the youngest believer here. There's only one Spirit that brings the Church together.

This morning we're going to look at 3 more truths that we need to embrace for unity.

There is one hope, one Lord and one faith.

1) Let's talk about our one hope. Read 4

I want to make 2 points about this hope. First, when we say "hope" what we mean is confident expectation.

When we talk about hope as Christians, we're not talking about hope like you **hope** to get a toy for Christmas. Or you **hope** your 401k goes up this year. Or you **hope** you get the job you want. That is a type of hope, it's sort of an optimistic wish.

But that's not what the Bible means when it says **the hope**. When we talk about hope, we're talking about something we know is going to happen, it's just a matter of when. It's confident expectation.

Turn to Heb. 11:1-3 Christian hope is confident expectation. It's knowing we're going to get the thing God has promised us. **Heb. 11** uses these concepts. **Read 1**

Let's stop right there. He defines faith as the assurance of things hoped for. Assurance, or conviction. We know that we know that this thing is true.

We know that we know that Jesus rose from the dead. Were you there? No. You didn't see it. No one you know saw it. It's written in our book here, but how do we know?

As Christians we don't say "well, I hope Jesus rose from the dead. Maybe he did, maybe he didn't but I hope so." That won't save you. That won't help you escape the wrath to come.

No, when we see the word hope in the Bible the idea is conviction. Assurance.

Conviction is knowing that the apostles saw the Lord raised from the dead. Conviction that 500 people saw him at once and were willing to testify to it. Conviction that no one would die for something they know is a lie and they all died for this truth. Conviction that the resurrected Jesus also ascended into heaven. Conviction that he is at work right now changing the world through his mighty word. Conviction that when God says in his Word he raised his Son, he did just that.

We know it even though we can't see it. That's Christian hope. It is conviction of something we can't see.

It's an assurance. A conviction. By the way, that's how we know that God made the world out of nothing. **Read 1-3**

We weren't there when it was created. We just know. How do we know? Because God told us. The end. He did it, he was the only one around, so everything we know about creation we know because God told us how it happened. And you can stand on that conviction because God said so.

So when we talk about faith in something or our hope, generally speaking, we mean conviction, assurance. It's being sure of something we can't see.

Okay. So that's the first part: when we say hope we mean confident expectation. Assurance. Conviction.

Second, what do we hope in? In Ephesians Paul says we have one hope. There's one future hope that unites all of us. What is that hope? What is that future thing that we can confidently expect? It's the return of Jesus to raise us from the dead. **Turn to Titus 2:11-13**

Now, I don't know if you remember this, but 15 minutes ago we sang a song called Christ Our Hope in Life and Death.

"What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone.
What is our only confidence
That our souls to him belong...

That's actually a catechism question we're singing.

Unto the grave what will we sing?
Christ he lives, Christ he lives,
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with him.

Then we will rise to meet the Lord
Then sin and death will be destroyed
And we will feast in endless joy,
When Christ is ours forevermore.

Oh sing hallelujah,
Our hope springs eternal

Oh sing hallelujah
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death.

The one hope we have is the return of Jesus to raise our dead bodies from the grave. **Read 11-13**

This is the blessed hope of every Christian: the return of Jesus. We're waiting for the appearing of Jesus. He's our God, he's our Savior. When he comes there will be glory and power and majesty the likes of which we can't imagine.

The glory that was shown on Mt Sinai will be like a candle compared to the supernova of Jesus's coming. **Turn to 1 Thes 4:13-18**

Here Paul talks about hope again. And he connects the coming of Jesus with our resurrection. **Read 13-18**

So when a Christian dies, we mourn. But we mourn with hope. Why? Because just like Jesus died and rose, so we will die and rise. When do we rise? When he comes.

The second coming is the greatest hope of the Christian. We often talk about when we die we go to heaven. We're with the Lord. That's true. But that's not our hope. The true total hope is the return of Christ.

And when Christ comes he will come with all the dead saints. And their bodies will be raised first. He's coming down with fanfare and trumpets cries of command. The dead saints who are with him will have their bodies raised and glorified first. Then we who are alive - if we're alive - will also be caught up to Jesus. Our bodies will be transformed. **Read 16-18**

Paul says this is the hope we have. This hope keeps us from despair and sadness. Just like Jesus rose from the dead we will rise from the dead.

But to be honest, a lot of times we miss this when we're telling people the gospel. Or we don't view it as a massive hope. I remember being a high schooler and hearing about Jesus coming back and to be honest I wasn't excited. I had some things I wanted to do before I died.

That's nonsense. That's like a soldier who had been fighting for years in the Vietnam war not wanting to come home when the war is over because they had some plans. Plans? I mean, we want to thrive the best we can, but we're in Babylon. We're building homes and planting gardens but we want the true Zion, New Jerusalem to come down out of heaven when our Savior appears.

1 Pet 1:13: Therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober minded set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Our entire hope is on the return of Jesus when he will raise our bodies from the dead.

So the hope is a certain expectation of the return of Jesus to raise our dead bodies. Why is that a point of unity of believers? Because no matter who you are in the Kingdom or what other theology you have, this is the end game.

Look back in Eph 4. Notice how Paul frames this. **Read 4:4**

There is one hope that belongs to your call. What does that mean? It means that when God called you into the Kingdom, when you were saved - your effectual calling - the hope that compelled you in was the hope of Jesus and the resurrection.

Or that should have been the hope that compelled you in. Maybe you were compelled in because you didn't want hell. Or maybe you were compelled in because you knew you'd stand before God and give an account of

your life. Or maybe you were compelled in because forgiveness and eternal life were sweet. Those are not bad things.

But the hope that belongs to your call and to my call and every Christian in every ages' call is the hope of the return of Jesus and our resurrection. And what's interesting is that the Bible portrays that whether we're alive or dead we want Jesus to come back.

Remember the martyrs in Revelation want Jesus to come. Why? To avenge their death. They want justice on the earth. They want the destruction of the wicked. And he says "wait a little longer."

So saints who are alive and saints who are dead are all waiting for one moment in history - the climax of history when Jesus comes and sets all things right. Destroys all of his enemies, glorifies all his saints and the New Heavens and New Earth begin.

If you're on a football team, doesn't matter if you're quarterback, running back, lineman, safety, special teams, defensive coordinator or head coach. What's your goal for the end of the season? Win a Super Bowl. Everything all season long is going toward that goal.

Maybe you don't like practices, maybe you don't like your teammates, maybe you don't like the trainers. But everyone is focused on exactly one thing: win the last game.

When we have a thing we're looking forward to we are entirely focused on that thing. That's all the saints of all the ages.

It's like looking through binoculars. The object in the binoculars is clear and crisp and magnified even though it's a long way off. And other stuff becomes more fuzzy because it's just not as critical. That's the coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead.

If we're all focused on that target then a lot of the other stuff that bugs us about each other isn't as important.

2) Next truth: One Lord. Read 4-5a

This should come as no surprise but the faith we hold dear is called Christianity. Everything we believe and do revolves around the person and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And here's the constant danger that we face, it's the danger the Pharisees faced and religious hypocrites faced: we can become consumed by good things, Christian things, religious things and yet have no love for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I mean it was the Pharisees - the religious conservatives - who memorized massive amounts of their Bible and yet didn't have any love for God. Jesus would constantly needle them, "Haven't you ever read?" They knew theology and doctrine and their father was Satan.

So everything we do has to come back to loving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me say 3 brief things about Paul saying the "One Lord."

A) The Lord Jesus has to be rightly defined. The Mormons say they believe in the Lord Jesus. But their Jesus is a created being, not equal to the Father.

The Jehovah's Witnesses say they believe in the Lord Jesus, but their Jesus is basically an angel, he's not God.

Catholics say they believe in the Lord Jesus, but their Jesus gets continually murdered every Sunday in every parish around the world.

Those aren't the biblical Jesus. So just because someone says they love the Lord, we need to pause and ask: which Lord? There's only one Lord: truly God, truly man, born of a virgin, who lived a perfect life under the Law

to redeem those from the Law through his once for all sacrificial death in the place of all those who believe in him. That same crucified Jesus rose bodily from the grave 3 days later.

Not rose in your heart, not rose spiritually. Rose in the flesh to prove that all the things he said and did were legitimate. And that same Lord Jesus bodily ascended into heaven and will one day come again bodily bring in the New Heavens and New Earth.

He did miracles, walked on water, fed thousands. And demands sole allegiance to him.

John 14:6 I am the way the truth and the life and no one can come to the Father except through me.

Romans 10:9-10: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is what? Lord. And believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified - counted righteous - and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

So all that to say you have to have the correct Jesus. Some people want to deny he's fully God, other people want to deny he's fully man, other people want to say he didn't really rise, others that he didn't really die. All of those sink the ship of salvation. Only one Jesus saves, that's the Jesus of the Bible.

So you have to have the correct Lord.

B) Second he has to be the only Lord in your life.

One of the chief problems with Israel in the OT was Yahweh was just one of many gods on their shelf. They worshipped Yahweh, but also Molech, Ashterah, Baal, Chemosh and others.

That doesn't work. Jesus is not content to be one of many lords in anyone's life. Or even the chief lord of anyone's life. To follow Jesus is to renounce all other lords and authorities.

This is what made Christianity so threatening in Rome. The emperors believed that they were gods. And yet Christianity said it was Jesus alone who was God. They wouldn't bow down to the emperor, they wouldn't bow down to the king. They wouldn't bow down to local magistrates.

Jesus alone is king. Jesus alone is kurios - lord. He's the master, we're the slaves, he's the sovereign, we're the subjects.

When you are saved you are saved in the Kingdom of God. Who's King? King Jesus.

And while we will obey other authorities and give them honor and respect and taxes as God commands. If ever there's a contradiction between the Lord Jesus and the authorities, his rule is our supreme allegiance.

There is only one Lord.

So we have to define the Lord rightly, he is the supreme authority in our lives,

C) We have to personally obey him.

It's enough to just call him "lord" and do whatever. No, calling Jesus lord means something. It means he's in charge of us.

Jesus said in **Matt 7:21-23:** "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never what? Knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
(Matthew 7:21-23, ESV)

Jesus doesn't even know people who call him Lord and yet live a life dedicated to lawlessness.

He says if you love me you'll what? Obey my commands. Obedience doesn't get us into heaven. But obedience is the fruit of life that has been transformed by the Lord. It's the fruit of someone who truly believes that Jesus *is* the Lord.

And this truth - that there is one Lord - rightly defined, supreme over all, and lord of our lives - is true of every single believer. This is what gives unity to the church. I believe Jesus is Lord, you believe Jesus is Lord, the folks behind you and to the side of you believe Jesus is Lord.

The baptist church, Indian Trail, Trinity Bible, Kootenai, the Vine - all of them believe Jesus is Lord. This is what binds us together.

We've got one hope, one Lord.

3) One faith.

Just like hope can have a subjective element to it, so can faith. People often talk about faith in a very subjective way. "My faith" "your faith." And again, like what we've seen throughout, there's a sense in which you personally have to believe in Jesus. That's what saves you from the wrath of God is your own personal faith, personal trust in Jesus.

But when the Bible talks about faith in this manner it's talking about *the faith*. The faith is the objective set of things we have to believe in order to be saved.

It's not just believe in Jesus, pray a simple prayer, walk an isle, whatever. There's a set of beliefs you have to have to be saved. **Turn to Romans 6:17-18**

This is one of my favorite places in the NT talking about what happened when we became Christians. What happened when we were saved? **Read 17-19**

What happened was that we became obedient from the heart - this is heart-felt obedience - the standard of teaching. NIV says form of teaching. NKJV says form of doctrine. There it is.

That's the idea. When someone is saved what happens in their mind is that they believe a list of doctrine. This is why we should never dumb down the gospel or the Bible to unbelievers. They have to be committed to a form of doctrine to be saved.

The Bible is the Word of God.

There is only one God, eternally existing in 3 persons.

All men are sinful and deserve eternal damnation in hell as the just punishment for their sin.

That we can work out way out of that.

That God being gracious sent his Son Jesus to be a sacrifice for guilty sinners who believe in him.

That Jesus rose the 3rd day, ascended and will come again.

That salvation is only by repenting from your sin and trusting in Jesus - the God Man - who is Lord over all to take the wrath you deserve and give you his righteousness.

There's 10 other things we could add in there but you get the idea.

That's why churches should have doctrinal statements. Doctrinal Statements contain the form of doctrine into which we were delivered. They also contain secondary issues as well, but they should contain the bare minimum someone needs to believe to be saved.

That's why we do membership. Why do we do membership? So we know who is all on the same page with the one faith. I mean how often do you go around quizzing other people about the virgin birth? Or penal substitutionary atonement? I can't remember the last time anyone asked me if I believe Jesus was sinless. I do. And you know that because I'm a member and you know that you and I and every other member hold to the faith.

I was talking with a guy months ago and we were on the same page on a lot of things. And as he was getting up to leave he said “hey, I don’t believe Mary was a virgin when she had Jesus - we should talk about that sometime.” He sort of just lobbed this theological grenade on me. Oh, well that means you don’t hold to the faith.

He has faith, he believes a lot of good things. But he doesn’t believe that Jesus was sinless, doesn’t believe what the Bible clearly teaches. And I’ll tell you what, if he doesn’t believe that you can be sure there’s a whole bunch of other things he doesn’t either.

We can love him, but there’s no unity there. There’s no tightness there because he doesn’t hold to the one faith.

These are the basis of our unity. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith. We’ll see the last 2 next week.

Pray

Psalm 121:7–8: “The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forevermore.”