

EPHESIANS: GOD'S GLORY IN THE CHURCH (study 7a)

Authority (pt. 1)

*And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "ALL AUTHORITY has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES of all nations, BAPTIZING them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, TEACHING them to observe ALL that I commanded you; and to, I am with you always (Gk. **all the days**), even to the end of the age.* MATT 28:18-20 (NAS)

He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to FILL the whole universe. EPH.4:10 (NIV)

Study 7a: IS the UNITY of the CHURCH VISIBLE? (4:1-3)

4:1 In Paul's circumstance and manner what shows clearly that the early church was NOT organized hierarchically?

Too many start with structures (and structures of some kind are indispensable), but the apostle starts with moral qualities. Certainly, in the quest for Christian unity, if we have to choose, we must say that the moral is more important than the structural. [Stott 148]

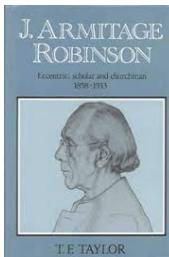
4:2,3 What unity did the church already have? How only could it be preserved? (1 Cor. 3:1-4)

Christian humility comes from *self-knowledge*. Bernard said of it, "It is the virtue by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness, in consequence of the truest knowledge of himself." [Barclay 135]

Humility, lowliness of mind key to unity

This emphatic appeal for "lowliness of mind", as the first of virtues to which their new position pledged them, must have been peculiarly impressive to converts from heathenism. To the Greek mind humility was little else than a vice of nature. It was weak and mean-spirited; it was the temper of the slave; it was inconsistent with that self-respect which every true man owed to himself. The fulness of life, as it was then conceived, left no room for humility. It was reserved for Christianity to unfold a different conception of the fulness of life, in which service and self-sacrifice were shewn to be the highest manifestations of power, whether human or Divine. [Robinson 91]

Whence come rudeness, pride, and disdainful language towards brethren? Whence comes quarrels, insults, and reproaches?



Come they not from this, that every one carries his love of himself, and his regard to his own interests, to excess? By laying aside haughtiness and a desire of pleasing ourselves, we shall become meek and gentle, and acquire that moderation of temper which will overlook and forgive many things in the conduct of our brethren. [Calvin 267]

To what carnal characteristics, must we confess, has the church given way throughout its splintering history? (Gal. 5:20; contrast vv. 22,23)

The real meaning of *agape* is unconquerable benevolence. If we regard a person with *agape*, it means that nothing that he can do will make us seek anything but his highest good. Though he injure us and insult us, we will never feel anything but kindness towards him. That quite clearly means that this Christian *love* is not an emotional thing. This *agape* is a thing, not only of the emotions, but also of the *will*. It is the ability to retain unconquerable good will to the unlovable and the unlovable, towards those who do not love us, and even towards those who we do not like. Peace may be defined as *right relationships between man and man*. This oneness, this peace, these right relationships can be preserved only in one way. Every one of the four great Christian virtues depends on the obliteration of self. So long as self is at the centre of things, this oneness can never fully exist. In a society where self predominates, men cannot be other than a disintegrated collection of individualistic and warring units. But when self dies and Christ springs to life within our hearts, then comes the peace, the oneness, which is the great hallmark of the true Church. [Barclay 140, bold emphasis added]

The church is one. When the apostle wrote this Epistle there were societies of Christians -- churches -- in Rome, in Corinth, in Thessalonica, in Philippi, in Colosse, in Ephesus, in the cities and towns of Galatia, in the Syrian Antioch, and in Jerusalem. There were less famous churches in other cities. They stood apart

"... no confederation of these independent societies under any central ecclesiastical authority"

Paul's spontaneous transfer of Jehovah texts to Christ

The second principle applicable to this and similar cases, is the identity of the Logos or Son manifested in the flesh under the new dispensation with the manifested Jehovah of the old economy. Hence what is said of the one, is properly assumed to be said of the other. Therefore, as Moses says Jehovah led his people through the wilderness, Paul says Christ led them. 1 Cor. 10,4. As Isaiah saw the glory of Jehovah in the temple, John says he saw the glory of Christ. John 12,41. As it is written in the prophets, "As I live, saith Jehovah, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God," Isa. 45,23, Paul says, this proves that we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Rom. 14,10. 11. What in Ps. 102,25, &c., is said of God as creator, and as eternal and immutable, is in Hebrews 1,10, applied to Christ. On the same principle what is said in Ps. 68,18, of Jehovah as ascending to heaven and leading captivity captive, is here said to refer to Christ. [Hodge 217]

from each other; every separate church had authority over its own affairs, maintained its own discipline, elected its own bishops and deacons, organised its own worship. As yet there was no confederation of these independent societies under any central ecclesiastical authority. Their unity was not constituted by an external organisation but by their common possession of the Spirit of God, and it is therefore called by the apostle "*the unity of the Spirit.*" [Dale 267]

Study 7b: CHURCH UNITY & TRI-UNE AUTHORITY (4:4-6)

4:4 Following upon Paul's analogy of the human body, how is the church INVISIBLY unified? (& organized; cf. Ps. 139:7,13-15; 1 Cor. 12:4-11)

As all true believers are members of this body, and as all are not included in any one external organization, it is obvious that the one body of which the apostle speaks, is not one outward visible society, but a spiritual body of which Christ is the



head and all the renewed are members. The relation, therefore, in which believers stand to each other, is that which subsists between the several members of the human body. A want of sympathy is evidence of want of membership. ... There is no doctrine of Scripture more plainly revealed than that the Spirit of God dwells in all believers, and that his presence is the ultimate ground of their unity as the body of Christ. As the human body is one because pervaded by one soul; so the body of Christ is one because it is pervaded by one and the same Spirit, who dwelling in all is a common principle of life. All sins against unity, are, therefore, sins against the Holy Ghost. They disperse that which he binds together. Our relation to Christ as members of his body; and our relation to the Holy Spirit who is our life, demands of us that we love our brethren and live at peace with them. [Hodge 203,204]

4:5 The "one faith" can have only ONE Lord. What dilemma is thus created for non-Trinitarian "faiths"? (cf. Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 8:5,6)

Their union, therefore, is not merely an external union, but inward and spiritual. They have the same faith objectively and subjectively. This unity of faith is not perfect. That, as the apostle tells us in a subsequent part of this chapter, is the goal towards which the church contends. Perfect unity in faith implies perfect knowledge and perfect holiness. It is only as to fundamental doctrines, those necessary to piety and therefore necessary to salvation, that this unity can be affirmed of the whole church as it now exists on earth. Within these limits all the the true people of God are united. They all receive the Scriptures as the word of God, and acknowledge themselves subject to their teachings. They all recognize and worship the Lord Jesus as the Son of God. They all trust to his blood for redemption and to his Spirit for sanctification. [Hodge 208]

4:6 What is an astounding attribute of the God and Father of Christians? (Jer. 23:23,24; 1 Kings 8:27)

We are now in a position to repeat the three affirmations, this time the other way round and in the order in which the Persons of the Trinity are normally mentioned.

First, the one Father creates the one family. Secondly, the one Lord Jesus creates the one faith, hope and baptism. Thirdly, the one Spirit creates the one body. ... Where, I ask myself, is this eagerness for unity to be found among evangelical Christians today? Is this an apostolic command we are guilty of largely ignoring? ... There is room for differences of conviction among us as to the precise form or forms in which God wants Christian unity to be expressed. But we should all be eager for some **visible expression** of Christian unity, provided always that we do not sacrifice fundamental Christian truth in order to achieve it. [Stott 151,154, bold emphasis added]

Study 7c: ONE & MANY, UNITY in DIVERSITY (4:7-10)

4:7 God the Father is in all (v.6). Christ fills all things (v.10). What esteem, therefore, should we have both for ourselves and other Christians?

The recognition of the whole is to St. Paul the starting-point for the consideration of the position of the individual parts. For the unity of which he speaks is no barren uniformity: it is a unity in diversity. It secures to the individual his true place of responsibility and of honour. [Robinson 95]

4:8-10 How does Christ compare with other conquerors?

When we hear of the ascension of Christ, it instantly strikes our minds that he is removed to a great distance from us; and so he actually is, with respect to his body and human presence. But Paul reminds us, that, while he is removed from us in bodily presence, he *fills all things* by the power of his Spirit. Wherever the right hand of God, which embraces heaven and earth, is displayed, Christ is spiritually present by his boundless power; although, as respects his body, the saying of Peter holds true, that "the heaven must receive him until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." Acts iii. 21.) [Calvin 276]

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