Opening Words

As helpful as Christian programs are, as great as Christian music is, as wonderful as different kinds of leadership in the church is, we must go deeper to find and experience the unity that the Spirit of God creates in the church. Unity in churches and among churches is based upon God Himself.

52 Ephesians Unity Comes from the Nature of God

What is Christian unity based on? What is the foundation of our unity with other Christians? Is it based on church structure? For example, some like a congregational style government in the church. Others like an elder led, presbyterian style government in their church. These can be important matters and we may gravitate towards one and not the other but I want to ask, is this the full basis of our unity?

How about worship style and music? Is our unity with other believers based upon the kind of music we prefer? Some of us move toward churches that have modern praise and worship choruses. Others prefer the great hymns of the faith. These can be important matters, and I have seen God's people worshipping him fervently with all kinds of music. In my life, I have worshipped him when modern bands have led in new songs. I have also worshipped him with pipe organs and the great hymns of the faith written by men such as Wesley or Watts. But, I want to ask, is this the basis of our unity?

Let me mention one more inadequate basis for unity – programs. Some people unite with churches because they have a good youth ministry, a great Sunday School class, a choir, or an outreach ministry that is dear to their heart. These can all be good things and in different seasons of our life they may help us or our family members tremendously. But we must realize that programs are an inadequate basis for unity with other Christians.

Hello everyone and welcome to our broadcast today. We have been looking in previous broadcasts at the kind of people God calls us to be. People of humility and gentleness, people of patience, people who show tolerance toward one another with a heart of love, and people who are diligent to maintain the unity that the Spirit of God Himself creates. This is all about character. Now, as we move deeper into Ephesians 4, we find that Paul gives the second foundation pillar for unity. Oneness of our Christian faith is based upon God Himself.

Seven times in verses 4-6 Paul uses the word one. Listen for them as I read these verses:

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also 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 over all and through all and in all.

Notice that four of these uses of "one" refer to our basic Christian identity – one body, one faith, one baptism, one hope of our calling. The other three uses of "one" refer to God – one Spirit, one Lord,

one God and Father of all, and, by the way, we see here a clear expression of the triune God – the Father in verse 6, the Lord Jesus in verse 5 and the Spirit of God in verse 4.

God Himself, His nature, His oneness, and the expression of his oneness in three persons – Father, Lord Jesus, and Spirit is to be the foundation of our oneness in the body of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, as fine as Christian programs are, as great as Christian music is, as wonderful as different kinds of leadership in the church is, we must go deeper to find and experience the unity that the Spirit of God creates in the church. Unity in churches and among churches is based upon God Himself. Listen to these words from John Stott in his commentary on this portion of Ephesians: "The unity of the church is as indestructible as the unity of God himself. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead."

And while the unity of the universal church remains indestructible in the eyes of God, we experience far less in our local churches. We squabble and we separate. This is surely a grief to God. And this is something that showed up in the first century! As early as Acts 6 there was division between the Jews who were native-born in the land and those Jews who lived outside the boundaries of Israel. It took a special work of the apostles to maintain unity. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of division is in Acts 15 when Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement with one another and separated. Another example is when Paul wrote the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians specifically to deal with the issue of division in the church.

And so, while we hear John Stott's eloquent and powerful words about the unity of the church being as indestructible as the unity of God, we must remember that our unity runs deeper than our division. There may be squabbling in the house of God and each of us may run to our Christian rooms and slam the door, but the foundation of the house of God remains firm. Our unity is in the nature of God Himself and if we would take time to think on Him, it would go a long way toward us opening our doors, and gathering in the Christian family room, so to speak, to love one another and glorify our great God.

What should we think about God? What is it about the nature of God and what he has done for us that should cause us to experience greater Christian unity?

Let's examine that in the remainder of our program today. Let's start with our heavenly Father. Notice how Paul describes him. Our God and Father is over all and through all and in all. In other words, he is behind everything, around everything, and in front of everything! You can't get away from him. He is the creator of the universe, the sustainer of the universe, and the goal of the universe for all are to worship him.

Now, let's think on Paul's words and apply them to unity. God is over all. This means he is sovereign, and if he is sovereign, then I am not sovereign. He is in charge. I am not in charge and the other person who we are having trouble with may think he is in charge, but he is not in charge either. When we think on this, we should humble ourselves under his sovereign hand, and we can comfort ourselves that God is over others. We can put on the "all humility" that Paul talked about earlier in this great passage.

Our God is through all. This means that God is the sustainer of the universe. His energy, His life runs through everything in the universe and keeps it going. If God were to withdraw this power for one moment, we would die. Kind of humbling isn't it! Kind of takes away that haughty spirit doesn't it! When we think of our puniness and his greatness, it helps us to focus less on ourselves, and when we focus less on ourselves that gives us a greater chance at unity.

And then, Paul says that our God is in all. This sovereign God who is over all, this life-giving God who is through all, also lives in his people! The God of the universe has come to live in his people. He lives in you and he lives in me and he lives in that rascally Christian that we just can't seem to get along with or that makes life difficult. This is what Jesus said in John 14:23, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him." God lives in all his people. We should treat them with great care and great respect.

In Ephesians 4:5 Paul says there is one Lord. He is referring to Jesus Christ. I am not the Lord. You are not the Lord. The one we are having trouble with is not the Lord. Jesus is the Lord, and we all must bow before him. Let's reflect for a moment why he is the Lord. Jesus is the Lord because he humbled himself and obeyed his Father all the way to the cross. He did this for people who yell and argue and curse and divide and have tantrums and hold grudges. He went to the cross, in humble submission to his Father for the people who populate our churches and who form cliques and who give cold shoulders and who won't fellowship with us. He went to the cross for them!

We read the Gospels and laugh sometimes, justifiably, at the silliness of the apostles, at their immaturity. But we forget that Jesus is still walking among his disciples today – you and me and we often exhibit that same behavior. It would do us well in our churches if we would pause and think on the Lord. Jesus is at the right hand of God from which he reigns over the kings of the earth. He is the Lord right now. The kings of the earth are not in submission to him, but he is the Lord. We would do well to meditate on the fact that he has all authority in heaven and on earth. He has all power. All angels, good and bad, acknowledge his Lordship and can do nothing apart from his allowance. He is the resurrected, glorified, exalted man and all of us have declared our loyalty to him, and if we are loyal to him then we must be loyal to and love one another.

Finally, in these verses Paul says there is one Spirit. Frequently, in his ministry Jesus said he would send the Spirit of God to his people. In John 14:16-17, Jesus said, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you."

In 1 Corinthians 12:13 Paul said, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." In context, Paul is talking about the work of God's Spirit to bring us into the body of Christ. And he doesn't baptize different groups into different bodies. He baptizes us into one body, and we therefore connect with one another. This forms a perfect segue into the four experiences that Paul speaks about in these verses – one body, one faith, one baptism, one hope. We'll have to wait until our next broadcast for that. But for today, may God give us a vision of Himself – the Father who is over all, through all and in all, the Lord who is Jesus exalted at the right hand of God, and the Spirit

who creates the unity in the body. The Father, the Son, and the Spirit work in perfect sync to bring unity to the body of Christ. This is the strong and certain foundation of unity in the church.