

## **Unity In Christ** by Jeff Strite

Ephesians 4:2-4:6

OPEN: A mother looked out a window and saw Johnny playing church with their 3 kittens. He had them lined up and was preaching to them and the mother smiled and turned around to do some work. But, just a short while later she heard meowing and scratching on the door.

She rushed to the door and looked outside and saw all the cats were sopping wet and Johnny was in the process of dunking the last of the kittens under water.

"Johnny, what are you doing?" she cried.

"I'm baptizing the cats." He replied

"Johnny, stop that! You'll drown those kittens."

Johnny looked at her and said: "They shoulda had thought about that before they joined my church."

APPLY: Whose church did Johnny think he was baptizing the kittens into?

That's right – HIS church.

I have encountered several believers over the years who had been baptized several times into several different churches. Every time they joined another church, they'd get baptized all over again into that new church.

Why were they baptized each time?\

Because each church believed it was "THEIR" church. If you joined THEIR church, you needed to be baptized into THEIR church.

Now, is that what the Bible teaches?

Of course not.

The Bible teaches that the church doesn't belong to us.

And if it doesn't belong to us, Who does the church belong to?

Colossians says "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy." Colossians 1:15-18

So, who does the church belong to? (Jesus)

And when we're baptized... who are we baptized into? (Jesus)

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:26-28

When you were baptized you weren't baptized into a local congregation.

You were baptized into Christ.  
You were buried with Christ, and raised with Christ, and now you live in Christ.  
And because of that you are all ONE in Christ.

This morning, we're talking about unity because we have 3 different worship services meeting together in one worship service. We're all meeting together in our new worship area - as one body. And we're doing this because we believe we are ONE BODY in Christ

Now, that wouldn't be anything to get excited about if it was just 3 English speaking services getting together.

Well... I might get pretty excited, because that would mean we would be larger congregation than we are right now. And if we had that many English services it would be nice to get us all got together a few times a year so that Anglos could see old friends.

But we have two Anglo worship services and one Hispanic and THAT is exciting. That is unique. In coming together for one worship service together, we are declaring to everyone that this is ONE church. One body in Christ.

That's what Paul wrote in Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all ONE in Christ Jesus."

Now, why would Paul write it that way?

Well because, in his day, Jews didn't eat with Greeks.

Slaves didn't mingle with free people.

And Men and women... well, they were men and women. They're different from each other.

Paul's point is that each of these groups - Greeks and Jews; Slaves and Free; Men and Women - were all different from one another.

But in Christ - once they'd been baptized into Christ, once they'd become part of the Christ's church - they all became one BODY.

Now, here we have Hispanics and Anglos.

How many of you cannot understand me when I speak in English?

How many of you cannot understand Jose (our Hispanic minister) when he speaks in Spanish?

Now, that's good, because I can't speak Spanish, and I can't share the love of Jesus with those who speak Spanish. But you who are in the Spanish church can.

And there are some here who can't speak English, and they can't share the love of Jesus with those who speak English. But those who are in the Anglo church can.

We are one body working together to share the love of Jesus with Logansport.

And, why are we ONE BODY? Because that's how God wants it.

Paul says: Ephesians 4:2-6 "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is ONE body and ONE Spirit— just as you were called to ONE hope when you were

called—ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism; ONE God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

If you and I are going to belong to God we have to be one body.  
And if we’re going to be that one body for Him, this church has got to belong to God.

ILLUS: Years ago I was driving a bunch of kids home after youth group. Most of these kids don’t go to church anywhere, so they don’t understand a lot. One of the kids asked me: “Do you own the church?”

To which I replied: “No, I don’t own the church building. It belongs to God.”

Now, how many of you agree with that statement?

Do you mean to tell me that this new Sanctuary belongs to God?

Do you mean to tell me that pulpit belongs to God?

Do you mean to tell me that this padded chair belongs to God?

But what if I donated money to buy this chair. It’s MY chair isn’t it?

What if I put my name on the bottom to declare this chair was MINE!? Doesn’t it belong to me?

Can’t I say to God (speaking to God) “This is MY chair and I’m going to sit in it. I don’t want to share it with anybody... and you can’t make me. BECAUSE IT IS MY CHAIR!”

(Pause)

That doesn't sound like a real smart thing to say to God, does it?

None of us here thinks so either. That’s why we’re having this UNITY service this morning - to declare to everybody that this building is to be used for God.

That means that as long as God sees fit to let us worship together here, we WILL be one church - Anglo AND Hispanic.

(PAUSE)

On my computer I have a “search function”.

I can type a word into a “search box” and my computer will search all of my files to find every file that has that word. So I typed in the word “unity” because I wanted to see if I had any illustrations with the word “unity” in it.

And I discovered something intriguing because my search function not only found illustrations with the word “unity” in them, but it also found WORDS that had “unity” as part of those words.

The word “unity” shows up as part of 3 other common words:

1. Comm-unity
2. Imm-unity
3. Opport-unity

And I thought... that’s interesting. But I wonder if that’s just an oddity of the English language. So, I texted Jose and asked if that was also common in Spanish. And it was.

The Spanish word for unity is "unidad" and it shows up in:

1. Com-unidad
2. Imm-unidad
3. Oport-unidad

And I thought – that's cool!

In fact, more than that... that will preach!

When we are one body in Christ... we have community because we COMMUNE with each other.

In fact we do something every Sunday that sounds like "commune". Do you know what that is?

That's right: COMMUNION.

We come together as ONE body at this table.

And when we come around this table we are ONE in Christ.

At that point we are in a COMM-UNITY

2ndly – when we are one body in Christ, we have AN IMM-UNITY.

We are immunized from something.

What does being in one body immunize us from?

- \* Selfishness.
- \* Hatred.
- \* Bigotry.
- \* Prejudice.
- \* Narrow-mindedness.

The Bible repeatedly tells us that we not only have "one faith, one Lord and one baptism" but we also have ONE Law that Jesus expects us to obey. Do you know what that "one law" is?

Jesus said: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34

In the next verse Jesus said: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35

You can NOT love one another if you have NOT been immunized against selfishness, hatred, bigotry, prejudice, and narrow-mindedness.

And if you don't love one another, then you are not part of the body because Jesus said people will know you are His disciples if you love one another.

As long as you and I remember that this is NOT our church - it's Christ's Church - then everybody who walks through those doors who has been baptized into Christ is part of this family. They are our brothers and sisters.

We will love one another – because we love Jesus (AMEN?)

3rd - when we are one body in Christ, we have AN OPPORT-UNITY.  
You see, the world is used to hatred and selfishness and bigotry.  
It happens all the time.

But when the world sees a church that actually LOVES each other.  
When the world sees a church where folks actually enjoy being with each other.  
The world becomes amazed.  
They don't understand that.  
And they can even become jealous of that.  
And that is what gives us our opportunity.  
It becomes our opportunity to tell the people about the love we have for each other and the love we all have from Christ.

ILLUS: At this church, we do all kinds of things together here because we are ONE BODY.  
Just this weekend we had a potato bar and "potato movie night" (we watched the movie: "Faith Like Potatoes") and we all sat around and ate potatoes together. There were about 60 people here and about 1/3 that were from the Hispanic church and 2/3s from the Anglo congregation.

And in the past we've gotten together to partake of a Passover meal and we've come together for a Tent Revival. Our kids have all come together for Youth Activities. And when we had a clean-up day more Hispanics showed up (percentage wise) than Anglos.

And this morning you were led in singing by our combined Anglo and Hispanic worship teams. They worked hard yesterday morning working out how they could combine English and Spanish worship songs... and I am so proud of them.

We are ONE church.  
The Hispanic church believes that ... and the Anglo church believes that.

CLOSE: I recently read a powerful statement by a black preacher named Sam Emory. He said:

"There's no such thing for me as a black church.  
There's no such thing for me as a white church.  
The church don't have no color.  
The only color the church is is red because of the blood of Jesus Christ."

Now, that was well said. But I don't think he took it far enough.  
I believe it is better to say:  
"There's no such thing for God as a black church or a white church.  
Or a brown church, or a yellow church.  
The church only has ONE color - RED.  
Red for the blood of Jesus."

We are ONE church. But you can't belong to that one church until you belong to Jesus.  
That's why we give an invitation at the end of every service...