

The Same, Only Different Part 2
Ephesians 4: 1-7

One of the most recognizable pieces of art in the world is a five-hundred-year-old mural painted on a monastery dining room wall in Italy. It was done by a man named Leonardo DaVinci, and it is an imaginary yet realistic snapshot of one of the most famous events in human history. Millions of copies and many variations of that famous painting are in circulation, and even those with little or no Biblical knowledge would immediately recognize it as a depiction of the earthly Last Supper of Jesus Christ.

We know from the gospel accounts that Jesus served that special meal to twelve of His closest followers in an upper room somewhere on a dusty and dirty street in Jerusalem. We also know that one of those twelve disciples chose to leave the table early that evening. He left before the supper was finished to be united with the enemies of Jesus, eventually betraying His host with a kiss. It was the Last Supper for both. Just a few hours later, Jesus would be crucified on a Roman cross and suffer six hours of agony before choosing to die for the sins of humanity. Judas would also choose to die, a victim of his own hand. In a strange way, they were the same, but different. Likewise with Judas and the other eleven disciples. They were the same, yet different.

It was at the very end of that last supper that Jesus prayed to His heavenly Father for those who would follow Him, in other words the church. He specifically prayed for three things. He prayed for His disciples to be protected from the evil forces of Satan, He prayed that they would be sanctified, or made holy by truth, by God's Word, and He prayed that they would be one, that there would be unity among them. Today we will take a closer look at what that means for you and me and for the church.

There is no doubt that unity is something near and dear to the heart of Jesus. However, much like love, peace, and joy, the Scriptural understanding of the term as it relates to the church is much different than that of the rest of world. For the church, unity is the same, only different. It is the same in that unity implies harmony, partnership, being like-minded, and lack of division.

The difference is that we know recognize that unity is not a virtue in and of itself. People can be unified in ways, ideas or even movements that ultimately do not bring glory to God. It is possible and today even common for people to be unified in things that are noble and good. That is true for those inside and outside of the family of God. The problem comes when we are more passionate about uniting around a particular cause or social issue than we are uniting in the truth, the revealed word of God. We become the body of Christ, in other words the church, when we are in unity with His truth. Without it, we are simply unified with the world.

You and I are called to be the church, followers of Jesus. And because we His followers, we are also “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” as Paul reminds the church at Ephesus. **Eph 4:3**. What does he mean by that? Even more importantly, what does that mean for us? It means we are called to seek unity. Not with the world, but with the holy things of God. Paul says it better than I ever could. **Col 3: 12-17**

Forgive me for saying it, but that does not describe the post-modern church. Let’s go back to Ephesians. In **4:4-6** Paul gives us several things that are part of true unity. There is only one true body of Christ, and that body is made up of individual believers brought together by the work of the Holy Spirit. There is only one true hope, the promise of eternal life through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. There is one true baptism, eternally sufficient to cleanse us from the stain of sin. There is one true God. **Deut 4:35** Unity becomes a virtue when we are one with other believers, one with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and one with the Scriptures.

We must also recognize something that unity is not. Uniformity. Paul reminds us of that in verse 7. We are one body, yet we remain individuals. We are same, only different. That implies that we may experience a different measure of God’s grace than the believer sitting next to us or behind us. To use a food analogy, the body of Christ might be compared to a giant potluck or carry-in dinner. Some people bring a salad, others bring a vegetable, some bring potatoes and others bring dessert. They are all carefully prepared with love, and then shared with others in love. It is one big meal with many different choices, varieties, and courses. Paul describes it this way in another of his letters to the early churches. **1 Cor 12:12-14**.

That passage brings to mind a part of the Great Thanksgiving. By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world until Christ comes in final victory and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf. The bread which we break is a sharing of the body of Christ.

We are the same, only different. Unity is not one but many. Love is the bond that keeps us together. The love that God has for us, the love we have for God, the love we have for each other, and the love we have for the Scriptures. Perfect love. Let us show the world what it looks like. Amen