

Sermon Title: **United in Love – Our Church Covenant – Part 5**

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Scripture Reference: **Ephesians 4:1-7 & 11-13**

Thesis: **The Fourth article of our Church Covenant emphasizes Christ's ability to unify the church.**

Purpose: **Today we will specifically focus on Jesus' desire to unify his followers in the New Covenant.**

Key Word: "Unity"

Key Points:           #1 **United in Witness to His Love**  
                              #2 **United in Dedication to His Mission**  
                              #3 **United in Seeking the Prompting of His Spirit**

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**I) Introduction:**

Scripture Reading is: **Ephesians 4:1-7 & 11-13**

**A) The Setting:**

- 1) When we read our Church Covenant we are reminding ourselves of our commitment to ally our conduct with God and with each other.**
- 2) While there is nothing legally binding in our covenant agreement we have a moral obligation to obey God in our relationship to Him and each other.**
  - (a)** The more I read and consider our Church Covenant the more I appreciate the power of it.
  - (b)** As we have broken it down I believe you can see how it is marvelously written based on the Word of God with each section emphasizing something about God.
- 3) The first paragraph establishes our commitment to one another.**
  - (a)** The second paragraph outlines the most important part of our Church covenant reminding us that with the help of the Holy Spirit *we will love one another as Christ has loved us.*
  - (b)** The third paragraph addresses how we are able to love one another by submitting ourselves to the training of the Spirit of Christ which produces the fruit of the Spirit given to every disciple of Jesus listed in Galatians 5:22-23.
  - (c)** The fourth paragraph now brings us to the Work of Christ's Church where we are to use the gifts of the Spirit to carry out the mission of the church.
- 4) The fifth paragraph and fourth article of our Church Covenant presents the power of unity in our submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit.**
  - (a)** Notice the emphasis of united with them, yoked with them, and receptive with them.
  - (b)** All of these speak to being united together in Christ and will make up our outline for this morning's message.
- 5) In the first message of the year I preached on a portion of today's scripture concerning the committing of ourselves to the work that has been given to us to do here in this place.**
  - (a)** This builds on last week's message of committing ourselves to the work of Christ's church.
  - (b)** And today's paragraph from our church covenant tells us how to be successful in carrying out that work in unity.
- 6) In Paul's letter to the Ephesians he is writing to explain God's eternal purpose in establishing His church.**
  - (a)** Chapter 4 begins the section that is specific to the practices which are important for Christ's believers.
  - (b)** How we are enabled by God's Spirit to carry out that work using the gifts of the Spirit.
  - (c)** As I read this passage again today pay particular attention to the word unity as used by Paul in this text.
- 7) So, with that introduction, let us turn in our Bibles to Ephesians 4:1-7 & 11-13. We will skip verses 8-10 which are a bit of a side note and focus on Paul's completed thought concerning Unity in the Body of Christ.**

**B) Sermon Prayer****C) (The Hook)**

- 1) This paragraph of our church covenant begins with the words "We join in communion with all who call upon the name of Christ in faith."**
  - (a) What does "We join in communion" mean?
  - (b) Our first thought is probably to the ordinance of Communion which we celebrate on the first Sunday of every month.
  - (c) Yes, that metaphor is somewhat appropriate; however, to fully appreciate what is being said here we need to focus on the word "*communion*" for a moment.
- 2) The word "*communion*" according to Webster's dictionary says . . .**
  - (a) It is from the Latin word "Communio", a sharing; so it is:
    - (i) One - An act of sharing, possession in common; participation.
    - (ii) Two - the act of sharing one's thoughts and emotions with another or others; intimate converse.
    - (iii) Three - an intimate relationship with deep understanding.
    - (iv) Four - a group of Christians professing the same faith and practicing the same rites.
    - (v) Fifth - a sharing in, or celebration of, the Eucharist, or Holy Communion.
  - (b) The verb form of the root word Commune is to make common, share.
  - (c) The noun form of the root word describes a group of common people in a community who are sharing interests and possessions.
- 3) So to understand what is written here we need to read it this way; "We join in sharing with all who call upon the name of Christ in faith."**
  - (a) What we are sharing is an intimate relationship with deep understanding as a group of Christians professing the same faith and practicing the same rites.
  - (b) Yes, we do share in Holy Communion; but that is an affirming of our covenant with Christ.
- 4) The POWER is found in our working together for the common good of Christ's church by what follows next in our covenant.**

TS: **We begin by seeing the power of being . . .**

**II) Body: (Key Points)****A) Key Point #1: United in Witness to His Love**

- 1) As we have already seen in our study that Jesus greatest pray in John 17 focuses on our unity.**
  - (a) First, with us being unified with Himself as He is with the Father;
  - (b) Second, with us being unified with each other.
- 2) The reason is given multiple times;**
  - (a) it is to let the world know and believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
  - (b) So they will believe God LOVED them enough to send His Son and wants them to experience that Love.
- 3) When we can be united in Christ and learn how to settle our differences peaceably it is a powerful witness to the POWER of God's love.**
  - (a) That doesn't mean that we agree in everything; but that we can care so deeply and intimately for each other that instead of getting angry, we can seek God's Spirit to help us find agreement.
  - (b) We do this humbling ourselves before God to seek His will and not insist on our own will.
  - (c) We do this by praying and seeking out what God's Word has for guidance and waiting for God's Spirit to bring us to complete Unity.
- 4) This is what Paul is talking about in His letter to the Ephesians.**
  - (a) Paul says live a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

- (b) We can do that when we are willing to *"humble ourselves showing gentleness and patience, and bearing with one another in love making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."*
  - (c) That means being able to set aside our disagreements dealing with others gently, with patience and love by trusting God's Spirit to unify us in peace.
  - (d) When this happens we can proceed.
  - (e) Do you believe that God can do this?
  - (f) I recommend just giving it a try.
- 5) **Do you think the world can do that?**
- (a) Can the world unite until they can find compromise and consensus?
  - (b) Of course not; as they are too focused on getting their own way.
  - (c) And they are befuddled when they see that we can trust God in our Faith and wait for God to bring us to a unifying consensus.
  - (d) No God means imposing your will over those who disagree.

TS: **What a witness to God's Love; next we are . . .**

- B) Key Point #2: **United in Dedication to His Mission**
- 1) **Our Covenant says Yoked like the harness for a team of oxen.**
- (a) They have been united by the yoke.
  - (b) Likewise we are united, yoked together in our dedication to fulfill the Mission of Christ's Church.
- 2) **Are we dedicated to God's mission here in our church?**
- (a) Do you even know what our mission is?
  - (b) I take my lead from two passages found in the gospel of Matthew.
    - (i) **The great commission found in Matthew 28:18-20**, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, <sup>20</sup> teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
    - (ii) **And the great commandment found in Matthew 22:37-39**, *"And He said to him, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** <sup>38</sup> This is the great and foremost commandment. <sup>39</sup> The second is like it, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."***
- 3) **So, I would put these verses something like this:**
- (a) We first have to take care of our own relationship with God to love Him with all our heart, soul and mind.
  - (b) If you haven't taken care of business with God, nothing else will matter.
  - (c) But once you have dedicated your life, giving it to Jesus, then you can begin to do the rest of the commandment to love your neighbor.
- 4) **Then we can focus on the work of Christ's church here with goals:**
- (a) To reach those who need God and introduce them locally and around the world.
  - (b) To disciple those who have given their lives to Jesus so that they may grow spiritually.
  - (c) To connect with our community in ways that show the love of Jesus to our neighbors so that it is genuine, tangible, and caring.
  - (d) To work within our association of churches in the Kennebec Baptist Association and the American Baptist Churches of Maine.
- 5) **In the Gospel of John 3:16-17**, Jesus taught; ***"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."***
- (a) I think this is pretty clear that God sent Jesus to save the world!
  - (b) Whomever in the WOLRD that believes in Jesus!
  - (c) That means ALL, everyone, all colors and races.

- 6) We are to take the message outside of these doors & into the world we live in.**
- (a) To the people we come in contact with in everyday life.
  - (b) To the people whom God brings in our path.
- 7) We need to be ready for the prompting of God's Spirit as we go through our days.**
- (a) It doesn't need to be forced;
  - (b) We only need to be open to the opportunities God gives us and the leading of His Spirit.
- 8) After all, while we are called to submit to God and let Him use us it is His ministry.**
- (a) God is the one who prepares people;
  - (b) The ones who are to share . . .
  - (c) As well as the ones who need to hear the message.
- 9) It is a great thrill to be used by God in this way.**
- (a) We should all be praying for opportunities instead of praying that God won't do it.
  - (b) Don't fear it because when God is leading, God will give you the words and it will seem as natural as breathing.
  - (c) It can be as exhilarating as being on a mountain top breathing the clear air with a spectacular view.
  - (d) Trust God to do this for you.

**TS: We are united in our witness to God's love, united in our dedication to His mission and third, we are . . .**

**C) Key Point #3: United in Seeking the Prompting of His Spirit**

- 1) When rock climbers are scaling a mountain they work together as a team.**
- (a) They tie themselves to each other.
  - (b) Do they do this to hold themselves back?
  - (c) No, they do it because it is safer, if one of them slips the others can pull them back up.
  - (d) They can achieve more together than alone and the same is true for us.
- 2) We can be much more powerful and successful in sharing God's love as a team.**
- (a) This is not just the job of the pastor.
  - (b) Many people including pastors feel like they are climbing the rocks alone with no one to catch them if they slip.
  - (c) We are all called by the same Spirit to use the gifts which God has given us to work together.
- 3) The last part of this fifth paragraph in our church covenant says that we will be "receptive with them to the prompting of His Spirit."**
- (a) This is key to our witness, sharing God's love, and fulfilling His mission.
  - (b) We cannot do our best unless we are receptive to the prompting of His Spirit.
  - (c) Not just alone; but together.
- 4) Like the rock climbers, we are better bound together.**
- (a) When one falls we can help them up.
  - (b) Only it is God's Spirit that is leading the climb.
- 5) That is why Unity was such a topic of great importance to Jesus.**
- (a) It was so important to him that in the hours before He was arrested Jesus prayed for unity.
  - (b) As we have said we encourage you to reread the longest recorded prayer by Jesus in John 17; for the reason for unity becomes so clear.
  - (c) To let the world know so they will believe that God loves them and HE can make a difference in their life too.

TS: **Our Church Covenant Unites Us . . .**

**III) Conclusion (Life Application)**

**A) Our Church Covenant reminds us of our unifying commitment to God and each other.**

- 1) How it is a covenant bound in Love toward one another.
- 2) How when we commit ourselves to God's Holy Spirit we can see the work of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives as found in **Galatians 5:22**.
- 3) How we are to use our gifts of the Spirit to build up the church and the body of Christ.
- 4) How God can unify us to work together agreeably so that we can be about the mission of Christ sharing the Love of Jesus with the world around us.

**B) But as I said, it begins with our personal relationship with God.**

- 1) I trust you have made that relationship by committing yourself to God accepting Jesus as your Lord and submitting to His Holy Spirit.
- 2) I hope you will also commit yourself to our Body of Christ here in this place and join our covenant.
- 3) For those of you who are already in our covenant; let us recommit ourselves to a deeper relationship in unity with God and each other.

**IV) Invitation:**