

**“The Unity of the Church”**  
**John 17:20-26**  
**January 24, 2021**  
**Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service**  
*Pastor Nicoletti*

We come this morning to the last portion of John 17, as Jesus prays with his disciples before his arrest.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father ...

<sup>17:20</sup> “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, <sup>21</sup> that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup> The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, <sup>23</sup> I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. <sup>24</sup> Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. <sup>25</sup> O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup> I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, like the psalmist,  
when we think of the direction you give us through your ancient word,  
we take comfort.  
Let your word be now our joy and delight,  
as we attend to it here in your house,  
so that we would remember your revelation as we go from here, day and night,  
that we may cling to and follow it.  
Give us that great blessing  
of walking in your ways, by the power of your Spirit.  
Grant this, we ask, in Jesus’s name. Amen  
[Based on Psalm 119:52, 54-56]

## **INTRODUCTION**

Our text this morning is on the unity of the Church.

Jesus is praying to God the Father. And the heart of his prayer in these verses is that his followers – those who believe in him, those who receive his word, the Church – would be one, would be united. In verse twenty-one Jesus prays that the disciples gathered there, and all who would believe

through their testimony, would “all be one”. Then he says it again in verse twenty-two, and again in verse twenty three, where he prays that his followers would “become perfectly one.”

And so it should come as no surprise that the unity of the Church is the theme we will focus on this morning.

To do that, we will ask five questions:

- First, what is the basis of Christian unity?
- Second, what are some objections to seeking Christian unity?
- Third, what are the patterns of sinful disunity?
- Fourth, what are the steps towards Christian unity?
- And fifth, what is our motivation for seeking Christian unity?

So: the basis, objections, patterns, steps, and motivations.

## **WHAT IS THE BASIS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY?**

So our first question is: What is the basis of Christian unity?

And, for that matter, what is the basis of any kind of unity?

As some of you were reminded on Wednesday morning, one good place to start in answering that question is with Saint Augustine.

In Book XIX of *The City of God* Augustine defines a people – a community – as “a multitude of rational beings joined together by common agreement on the objects of their love.” A people is united by what they most love.

Augustine goes on to explain that any community can be defined this way. He also explains that what a community most loves will shape that community and the people in it – for good or for ill. Some communities are united by a love for something good. Others are united by a love for something that is bad. [Augustine, *City of God*, XIX.24]

But Augustine then points out that even when it is a love for something good in the world that unites a people – even when it is love for a particular virtue that unites a community – still, that unity is not a unity that will last.

True unity, lasting unity, depends on an object of shared love that can bear the weight of our ultimate love, of our purpose and of our identity.

And no created thing, even if it is good, is able to bear that weight indefinitely.

That is one reason why unity in this world is often so fleeting. A people come together, but it never lasts, because the object of their chief love cannot bear the weight.

This is, as the Bible tells us, because no created thing was ever intended to be our highest love – either as individuals or as communities. No created thing can bear that weight, because human beings were designed for God to fulfill that role. Only God, only our Maker – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – can bear the weight of being our chief love. When we take any created thing – as

good as it might be – and we make it ultimate in our lives or in our communities, it always lets us down; it always disappoints.

Which is what makes the Church so different from other communities.

Because the Church's highest love is to be the triune God: the Father, our Maker; Jesus Christ, his Son, sent into the world to save us; and the Holy Spirit, who has come to unite us to God in love.

Jesus says as much in our text. Those united are those who "believe" in Jesus, as he says in verse twenty. They are those who have the love of God in them, as he says in verse twenty-six.

So, that is the answer to our first question. What is the basis of Christian unity? The basis of Christian unity is that Christ's followers share a common chief love: their love for God the Father; for Jesus Christ, his Son; and for the Holy Spirit.

### **A NOTE ON SCOPE**

Now, at this point we need to stop and ask what our scope will be this morning. Because we could look at this theme of Christian unity on a number of different levels – and each one is worthy of attention.

We could talk about this on the level of denominationalism: the institutional divisions that exist between churches at a national and global level. Because while many of those divisions are practically necessary, many others are not. And whether they are necessary or not, those divisions should bother us. And instead, we are usually quite comfortable with them. What does Jesus's prayer have to say about that?

Or we could talk about Christian unity on the level of race and ethnicity. Over 60 years ago, Martin Luther King Jr. said "I think it is one of the tragedies of our nation, one of the shameful tragedies, that 11:00 on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not *the* most segregated hour in Christian America." And not much has changed. And once again, just as distressing as these divisions themselves is the fact that they don't really bother us. Though the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ was such an important and costly thing in the early church, they refused to give in to disunity based on ethnicity. But we scarcely even think about it. What does Jesus's prayer have to say about that?

Or we could talk about Christian unity on a local level: Why are we not more united with other congregations in our city? Why don't we do more together? We do we often act more like friendly competitors in a religious marketplace instead of fellow members of an extended family? And what does Jesus's prayer have to say about that?

Each of those levels is important. But when I tried to include them all, my sermon outline became a disaster. So we will have to be more modest this morning. We will have to set our sights on something more immediate to begin. We will begin by asking: What does Jesus's prayer have to say about us, and how we relate to one another, here at Faith?

Jesus calls us to unity. He calls us to unity that is based on our shared love for him. For the remainder of this morning we will consider what that means for us, right here, in our congregation.

## **WHAT ARE SOME OBJECTIONS TO CHRISTIAN UNITY?**

But before we get there we need to consider a few common objections. Because for some people, when they hear a call to unity, some red flags go up. And so our second question is: What are some objections to a call to Christian unity?

The first objection we might hear is that Christians, as Christians, are automatically united in Christ by their shared faith and by the Holy Spirit, and so no further action is needed on our part to fulfill what Jesus prays for here. If we believe, we are united in spirit, no matter what our external relationships might look like.

But if we look closely at our text, we see that that won't fit. First of all, Jesus speaks of our belief and our being united as two separate things – and grammatically he speaks of our union as something that may potentially happen, not as something that will certainly happen, between those who believe. [Wallace, 448, 463]

But in addition to that, we should note that Jesus says the world will see this unity. It is not internal, or in principle, or a unity only in spirit. It is an observable unity – a visible unity. It must be manifested externally, in our actions. It therefore is something we must *do*, not something we will automatically *be*.

That answers the first objection some may raise.

The second is different. The second objection usually includes an eye roll, as it says: “Okay, here we go, an appeal to unity. That means we throw truth and theology out the window, as if they don't matter, and embrace a squishy, lowest-common-denominator evangelicalism.”

Let me give three responses to this objection.

The first, is that as Christians, we should care about Christian unity. Jesus clearly does here. And historically, the best leaders of the Church cared about *both* theological truth *and* Christian unity.

John Calvin was asked in a letter by Thomas Cranmer about his interest in a possible council to better unite the Reformed Church. He wrote back “So much does this concern me, that, could I be of any service, I would not grudge to cross even ten seas, if need were, on account of it.” [Calvin, 348]

Calvin and Jesus cared about both unity and truth. You should too.

Second, we need to notice that spiritual danger lies not only in doctrinal or ethical laxity, but also in doctrinal or theological factionalism.

The Puritan Richard Baxter writes: People “are dangerously mistaken [who] think that Satan has but one way to men's damnation. There are as many ways to hell, as there be to the extinguishing of love.”

“Baxter goes on to suggest that an overly strict and fault-finding spirit” which leads to divisions “is one of Satan's principal means to discouraging love among Christians.” [Ortlund, 40]

He writes: “Satan will pretend to any sort of strictness, by which he can mortify love. If you can devise any such strictness of opinions, or exactness of church orders, or strictness in worship, as

will but help kill men's love, and set the churches in division, Satan will be your helper, and will be the strictest and exactest of you all: He will reprove Christ as a Sabbath breaker, and as a gluttonous person, and a wine-bibber, and a friend [...] of publicans and sinners, and as an enemy to Caesar too." [Baxter, *The Cure for Church Divisions* 1.2.6, quoted in Ortlund, 40-41]

Heresy is not the only way to hell. Phariseeism is another.

Which brings us to the third aspect of a response to this objection: Not every difference, not every disagreement, warrants division.

We see this truth at work in the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

On the one hand, Paul did not back down from the fact that a couple in Corinth who were unrepentant in their sexual sin should be excommunicated until they repent. [1 Corinthians 5] On the other hand, with the Christians in Rome, as they disagreed on a number of ethical questions, he urged them that they should each be convinced in their own minds, and not use their different ethical opinions as grounds for division. [Romans 14]

When it comes to doctrine, the Apostle Paul told the church in Galatia that he was ready to cast out any who would deny the heart of the gospel [Galatians 1:8], but when it came to less consequential beliefs in the Church, Paul urged Timothy not to get involved in minor controversies or "quarrels about words" which are not necessary but only divide the church. [1 Timothy 6:4; 2 Timothy 2:14]

Al Mohler has spoken of these distinctions as "theological triage" – and in his recent book titled *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*, Gavin Ortlund expands that concept. In the book, Ortlund focuses on three levels of theological disagreements. There are primary issues which are essential to the gospel itself. These are doctrines and commands that, if we should reject them, we are rejecting God himself as he is revealed in the Scriptures.

Next, there are second-rank issues. These are very important issues, but not essential ones. And while they are not essential, especially for pragmatic reasons, they may require division. Views on charismatic gifts, or the ordination of women, affect the way the Church conducts its very worship, and to keep from violating anyone's conscience, division would be required on these issues, among others.

But then there are many third-rank issues that Ortlund argues are never biblical grounds for division among Christians.

Divisions over primary issues are necessary out of love for Jesus. Some secondary-level divisions may be necessary for the sake of guarding one another's consciences. But for many issues beyond those, the Church's unity does not need to be sacrificed, especially not at the congregational level.

And that can be true even as each congregation holds to a distinct theology.

The officers of our church, as a church in the PCA, are required to receive and adopt an 82-page statement of faith that includes a Confession and two Catechisms, and they are also required to approve of a 153-page document on the government of the Church. On the other hand, to become a member of a church in the PCA, like ours, you only need to affirm 5 sentences. As one of my former pastors used to say: You don't need to be Presbyterian in order to be Presbyterian. And that

is as it should be. At the congregational level, when at all possible, non-essentials are not to be grounds for congregational division.

Essential matters, practically significant issues, and serious moral failings on the part of a church may give grounds for division. But lesser disagreements should not.

It is possible for us to be united, as a congregation, while we disagree on many different things.

The call to unity is not a call to squishy evangelicalism. It is a call to see our theological and ethical differences in their proper place. It is a call to value Christian unity enough to resist division for unnecessary or sinful reasons.

## **WHAT ARE THE PATTERNS OF SINFUL DISUNITY?**

With those objections out of the way, that brings us to our third question: What are the patterns of sinful disunity? What are the patterns of sinful disunity?

And here, C.S. Lewis is helpful.

In his book *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis presents a series of letters in which an older, more experienced demonic tempter, named Screwtape, advises a younger, less experienced demon, on how to draw someone away from following God.

In one letter Screwtape explains to the younger demon that when it comes to political positions or causes, it didn't so much matter what position the man he is tempting takes, so long as the man is pushed to become extreme in his views. Screwtape explains: "All extremes, except extreme devotion to" God – whom the demon refers to in the letter as "the Enemy" – "are to be encouraged." He goes on: Ages like the present, he writes,

"are unbalanced and prone to faction, and it is our business to inflame them. Any small [group], bound together by some interest which other men dislike or ignore, tends to develop inside itself a hothouse mutual admiration, and towards the outer world, a great deal of pride and hatred which is entertained without shame because the 'Cause' is its sponsor [...]. Even when the little group exists originally for the Enemy's [that is, for God's] own purposes, this remains true. We want the Church to be small not only that fewer men may know the Enemy but also that those who do may acquire the uneasy intensity and the defensive self-righteousness of a secret society or a clique. The Church herself is, of course, heavily defended and we have never yet quite succeeded in giving her all the characteristics of a faction; but subordinate factions within her have often produced admirable results, from the parties of Paul and of Apollos at Corinth down to the High and Low parties in the Church of England."

Then, returning to the choices of extreme Patriotism or extreme Pacifism, Screwtape writes:

"Whichever he adopts, your main task will be the same. Let him begin by treating the Patriotism or the Pacifism as a part of his religion. Then let him, under the influence of partisan spirit, come to regard it as the most important part. Then quietly and gradually nurse him on to the stage at which the religion becomes merely part of the 'cause', in which Christianity is valued chiefly because of the excellent arguments it can produce in favour of the British war-effort or of Pacifism. The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience. Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing. Provided that meetings, pamphlets, policies, movements,

causes, and crusades, matter more to him than prayers and sacraments and charity, he is ours—and the more ‘religious’ (on those terms) the more securely ours. I could show you a pretty cageful down here.” writes the demon, from his office in hell. [Lewis, “Letter VII”]

A people are unified by their highest shared love.

And so the work of the devil is to get God’s people to take those things that are less important – those things that are second-level or third-level concerns in life – and to make them equal to or even greater than our love for Christ. *That* is how you divide a congregation. That is the pattern at the *heart* of sinful disunity: taking something else, and making it an equal or a rival to Christ as our chief love, so that *it* becomes our highest love, and the source of our ultimate unity, rather than him.

Sometimes individuals do this and leave churches who refuse to elevate their idol to the level of Christ.

Sometimes whole congregations do it, and those who leave are the ones who refuse to follow the congregation in its idolatry.

Or sometimes the majority of a congregation adopts one idol while those who leave it adopt a rival idol.

But in the case of sinful church disunity, exactly the kind of idolatry described by C.S. Lewis is often at work.

Now, again, not every loss of unity at a congregational level is sinful.

As we have said, some division may be necessary over theological disagreements. And, of course, other practical aspects of life may make it best for someone to transfer their membership to another church for a range of reasons.

Not every instance of disunity is sinful. But every time we must separate – every time disunity occurs – we should stop, and reflect, and honestly ask ourselves why that disunity is occurring, and we should consider whether our sin – our idolatry – might be the cause.

So, we have said that the basis for Christian unity is our love for the God revealed in the Christian Scriptures.

We have considered some common objections to seeking Christian unity in practice.

We have considered the patterns of sinful disunity in a church congregation.

## **WHAT ARE OUR STEPS TOWARDS CHRISTIAN UNITY?**

This brings us to our fourth question: What are the steps we should be taking towards Christian unity?

What are the steps we should be taking, at the level of our congregation, towards the kind of unity that Jesus describes here?

And here we will consider three things: we must identify potential sources of sinful division for us, we must intentionally resist sinful division, and we must actively pursue loving unity in Christ.

So the first thing we must do is identify those things that you individually, or that we as a congregation, might be tempted to elevate to the status of a rival love to Jesus. These are the kind of things that can lead us to functionally saying or believing that our congregation should be about Jesus *plus* this other thing.

And those potential rivals might be demographic or ideological.

And when I say that might be demographic, I mean that they might be rooted in our love for the sense of comfort we feel when we are around people like us: People of the same cultural background as us. People in the same socioeconomic class. People of the same age group. People of the same marital status.

Relationships with people like us are comfortable. And we love our comfort. And so we must first consider how the love of demographic comfort might be a functional rival to Christ when it comes to who we seek connection and Christian unity with.

But then, in addition to that, there are potential ideological rivals to Christ in our hearts and in our life together. We need to identify those as well.

And here is a hint – and also what makes this so difficult: Those other things are probably good things. They are probably important things.

Because idolatry, at its heart, is not about taking a bad thing and treating it as a good thing. Instead, it's almost always about taking a good thing and treating it as an ultimate thing – it's about taking a very important thing, and treating it as the most important thing.

So what is very important to you? What is very important to us, as a congregation?

One thing might be Christian education. Another might be how a Christian home is best organized. Maybe it's the framework of how we relate to the secular culture around us. Maybe it's how we relate to music and the arts. Maybe it's how Reformed we are. Maybe it's how we view and approach secular politics.

Again, each of these things is important, and each can be very good. But none of them is ultimate.

And by saying that none of them is ultimate, that doesn't mean that we, as individuals or as a congregation, shouldn't have convictions about them – we should. But it means we need to be very careful about how we hold onto those convictions.



A comparison might be helpful. You can be a fully accepted and involved member of our church even if you hold to Baptist convictions. That doesn't mean our church doesn't have a conviction about infant baptism – we do. It doesn't mean we have to hide or avoid teaching on our conviction about infant baptism – we don't. We are Presbyterians, and we have and promote a certain perspective on infant baptism.

But a Christian family of Baptist convictions, though they disagree with us on infant baptism and though they refrain from baptizing their own children as infants, should never feel as if we look down on them because their views are contrary to ours. They should never feel as if they aren't welcomed here because of their views on infant baptism. They should never feel as if some people avoid a closer relationship with them, or don't want their kids to spend too much time with theirs, because of their views and practice in the realm of baptism. Infant baptism should not be a reason for division within our congregation, even though both on paper and in practice our church has a distinct position on the issue.

And the same thing should be true for those other issues we listed just a moment ago.

Of course we are a church that values Christian education. We run a Christian high school! We have a Christian K through 8 school running out of our basement. We provide financial help for families seeking Christian education for their children. We speak about our views on the value of Christian education from the pulpit.

That is all true. Christian unity doesn't mean that any of that needs to change.

But it does mean that we better not make a family that disagrees with us on Christian education feel as if they don't belong here. We better not look down on them. We better not make them feel unwelcome. We better not avoid deeper relationships between our family and theirs. We better not raise the issue of Christian education to make it an essential issue for the functional unity of our church. For if we do, we make it an idol – we make it a rival to Christ.

And the same is true for how we organize our Christian households, how we approach the unbelieving world, what kind of music, art, and entertainment we enjoy, how we think about our theological identity, and how we think of and participate in our nation's politics.

The question is not whether these things are important. The question is not whether our congregation has a particular majority view, or a view that is taught from the pulpit. The question is *how* we hold those views – what level of importance do we give them?

Do we allow our love for them to become rivals to our love for Christ, making us a congregation that is not united primarily by our love for Jesus, but by our love for Jesus *plus* our equal or greater love for something else?

So first we must identify those potential idols – those potential reasons for sinful division.

Second, we need to resist planting the seeds of division over those things, and pull out any roots of division that might already exist.

Most obviously this means that we avoid either formal or informal divisions with those who might disagree with us on any of those issues.

But along with that it also means we exercise wisdom on when we challenge someone on any of those issues.

In our culture there is sometimes this sense that if we think anyone is wrong, it is our duty to correct them, and to press the point until there is a resolution. Whole social media companies generate much of their revenue based on this cultural problem, and while it is quite profitable for capturing and selling people's attention, it is not in keeping with Christian wisdom.

Christian wisdom knows when and how to challenge a brother or sister in Christ who needs to be challenged. But Christian wisdom also knows when to let someone express their own opinion, and then pass over it without comment.

Augustine was not a man who shied away from necessary debates or controversies. But he also was intentional about avoiding unnecessary disputes.

In book five of his *Confessions*, Augustine explains how he has resolved that when a “fellow-Christian expresses a mistaken opinion arising from his ignorance in” some field, so long as they are not believing something “unseemly” about God himself, Augustine writes “I regard with tolerance the person who entertains that [mistaken] notion.” This, Augustine says, is his usual policy, *unless* the one who is in error is insisting that his mistaken belief is an essential part of Christian faith. Then Augustine sees confrontation as necessary. But even then, he says that among younger believers, a certain kind of gentle patience is called for. Only towards one who claims to be a teacher is a harsher confrontation called for. [*Confessions*, V, 5, 9]

We too should be careful to avoid the seeds of disunity. Of course we are called on to lovingly correct one another in order to build one another up – that's not the point. The point is that when it comes to areas where we might be tempted to treat an issue as more important than we should, we must be especially careful that we do not let it become a source of division in our lives or in our congregation.

So, we need to identify possible sources of sinful division; we need to pull out the roots of sinful division from our hearts and avoid planting new seeds of division. And then, third, we need to cultivate unity with people different from us.

When someone in our church is different from you, it is not enough simply to not leave yourself, or to refrain from driving them out. You are called to unity with them. You are called to unity in love.

This applies, of course, to those you have ideological differences with: those who think differently than you, who do things differently than you, but who share your love for Christ. When you actively pursue a relationship with them, you not only show them the love of Jesus, but you affirm that the love for Christ that is shared between you outranks all of those other areas of disagreement.

The same also applies for those who are demographically different from you. When you reach out to someone of a different generation than you, or a different marital status, or a different socioeconomic status, or cultural background, or educational background, you are affirming that the Church is not just another worldly affinity group for like-minded people, but it is a family – the family of God – united with a bond that outranks every other bond in this life.

Of course, actually doing that is not so easy.

It takes work.

Which leads us to our final question ...

## **WHAT IS OUR MOTIVATION FOR SEEKING CHRISTIAN UNITY?**

Why should we do all this?

What should motivate us to do the work it will take to seek to be *this* kind of Christians and *that* kind of church, those who seek the kind of Christian unity that Jesus describes here in our text?

Briefly, let me give you five motivations.

First, Jesus wants this kind of unity among his people. And that should be reason enough.

Jesus here tells us that this is what he desires for his Body – he desires that we be united as one, and not sinfully torn asunder. That should be reason enough to motivate us. But even so, he gives us more reasons.

Second, Jesus tell us here that the unity of the Church is a proclamation to an unbelieving world. That's what Jesus says in verse twenty-one – he prays that the church may be one, so that the world would believe that God the Father really sent Jesus Christ.

The church, in its unity, is to be other-worldly. It is supposed to confound people's expectations and overturn their paradigms. People are to look at the Church and see groups who would normally hate each other instead loving one another for the sake of Christ. And by doing that, the Church proclaims, not just in words, but in deeds, that Christ really is her chief love. Such a display is to cause the unbelieving world to pause, and to see the proclamation – contained in our love for one another – that among us Christ really is supreme over all.

Third, we should seek the unity of the Church because the unity of the Church images God.

That is what Jesus says in verse twenty-two: Jesus prays that we would be one, just as Jesus and God the Father are one. Our triune God is a unity in diversity. He is one God in three persons. He is a mystery. And as the Church, we are called to bear his image in a special way. We, a diverse body, are to be united in love, in a way that shows forth the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, in the unity of God the Holy Spirit.

That is a high and holy calling. We are called to bear the image of God not only to the watching world, but also to one another, to the holy angels, and to God himself. We should be willing to sacrifice our comfort for such an honor.

Fourth, we should be willing to seek this unity, because God has empowered us supernaturally. The power of God the Father is in it. The Holy Spirit is at work to make it possible. And Jesus Christ has died to tear down worldly walls of hostility and unite his people as one. We need not despair over our weakness, because the power of God is at work among us, to knit us together. For as Jesus prays in verse twenty-six, God is able to make the love with which the Father loved the Son to also be at work in us, his people.

Fifth and finally, we should pursue this kind of unity because it is God's ultimate plan for this world, and as such, it is a foretaste of eternity.

God indeed divides humanity in the Scriptures. But he does it towards the final goal of a new unity. He calls Abraham out from the Gentiles, but then calls him to bless all nations. He separates the church from the unbelieving world, but then sends us to make disciples of all nations.

The goal of God's work in this world – the goal of the mission of God – is a united diverse multitude.

In the Book of Revelation the Apostle John is given a glimpse into eternity, and this is what he sees – he says:

I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" [Revelation 7:9-10]

That is how God's people will dwell in the new heavens and the new earth. And as we long for heaven, so we should long for that. For even now, in the unity of the Church, we are called to a foretaste of that heavenly unity.

Jesus has prayed for our unity. Jesus has died for our unity. Let us not dare to devalue it in our hearts, in our lives or in our congregation. But relying on his love for us, let us love one another, and together, let us love Christ above all.

Amen.

---

**This sermon draws on material from:**

Augustine. *The City of God*. Volume 2. Introduction and Translation by William Babcock. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2013.

Augustine, *The Confessions*. Translated by Maria Boulding. Second Edition. The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2012.

Calvin, John. *Letters of John Calvin: Compiled from the Original Manuscripts and edited with Historical Notes*. Edited by Jules Bonnet. Translated by M.R. Gilchrist. Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1858. [Quoted in Kuiken, Matthew H. "The Reformed Catholicity of John Calvin." November 24, 2020. (Unpublished)]

Carson, D.A. *The Gospel According to John*. PNTC. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991.

French, David. *Divided We Fall: America's Secession Threat and How to Restore Our Nation*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press: 2020.

Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996 Print Edition.

King, Martin Luther Jr. "The Most Segregated Hour in America":

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L\\_d8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q881g1L_d8)

Ortlund, Gavin. *Finding the Right Hills to Die On: The Case for Theological Triage*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.