

**Jesus Unites All Things in Himself**  
**Sunday, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024**  
**By Ryan Perry**

**Scripture**

**Ephesians 1:7-10**

*[7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

**Let's Pray**

As we walk through the book of Ephesians, we are walking through what scholars call the “**crown of Pauline theology**” because in large measure it summarizes in its 6 chapters the main themes of all of Paul’s letters.

Personally, I tend to look at Ephesians like powdered “tang.” How many of you have ever drank “tang?” If you don’t know what it is it’s a powdery sour drink that you mix with water, kind of like cool-aid.

Now, imagine taking a spoonful of “tang” powder and trying to eat it without putting it in water. It would be super intense, sour, and hard to get through.

Ephesians is like that. It is so dense and intensely packed with theological truth that on one hand it is a beautiful and majestic letter, but on the other, it can be difficult to understand the nuances of what Paul is trying to communicate.

As far as authorship goes, despite some modern Criticism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century most scholars do agree that Paul is the author and that he wrote this to the Ephesian church sometime around A.D. 62 while he was in prison in Rome.

He was writing to a church made up predominantly of Gentiles (non-jews), however, based on Paul’s preaching in the Ephesian synagogue in Acts 19:8-10, and based on Ephesians 2, **as we will see**, there were probably Jews present in this church as well.

Now, normally when Paul writes letters, he is writing to correct a problem or to address an issue within a church, but there doesn’t seem to be any issue or problem that he is addressing here.

However, that doesn’t mean there isn’t a main message or idea that he wants to communicate. In fact, we find Paul’s main idea laid out in the verses that we opened with where he writes in Ephesians 1:9-10:

*[9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, **to unite all things in him**, things in heaven and things on earth.*

The main thing that Paul wants this church to understand is that God’s overarching plan in creation is to unite everything in and to Christ.

This is the message that this book opens with and it's the message that he carries through all 6 chapters of the book of Ephesians. We can see this clearly in the following outline of this book.

### **A New Creation People Formed and United in Christ (Eph 1-3)**

- Spiritual blessings and unity with Christ (Eph 1-2:10)
  - Spiritual blessings in Christ (Eph 1:1-23)
  - New life in Christ (Eph 2:1-10)
- Mystery and Unity of Christ's People (Ephesians 2:11-3:21)
  - We are one in Christ (Eph 2:11-22)
  - Mystery of Christ and his people revealed (Eph 3:1-20)

### **Living as a United People in Christ (Eph 4-6)**

- Walk in Unity (Ephesians 4:1-16)
- Walk in Holiness (Ephesians 4:17-32)
- Walk in Love (Ephesians 5:1-21)
- Submit to One Another (Ephesians 5:22-6:9)
  - Wives and Husbands (Eph 5:22-33)
  - Children and Parents (Eph 6:1-4)
  - Slaves and Masters (Eph 6:5-9)
- Prepare for spiritual warfare (Eph 6:10-20)
- Final Greetings (Ephesians 6:21-23)

With this outline in mind, we are going to walk a similar path as we look at Christ's unifying work in our lives as believers, his unifying work in all creation, and then finally, how we are to live in light of the unifying work he has done.

Let's begin by looking at the unifying work that Christ has done in our lives as individual believers.

#### **1. Jesus reconciled and united us to himself (Eph 2:1-7)**

##### **Ephesians 2:1-7**

*[1] And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—[3] among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. [4] But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, [5] even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—[6] and raised us up with him and seated us with him*

*in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, [7] so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

I don't know how many of you are consumers of the fast-food chain Wendy's, but there is a long-standing tradition where people will take Wendy's fries and will dip them in one of their frosty's (a kind of thick ice cream shake).

Now, I don't know about you, but at first glance, it doesn't seem like a hot and fried potato strip has any business being dipped in any kind of ice cream shake. But if you've tried it, you know it works, and it's good.

Two seemingly opposite foods unite to make this amazing salty and sweet confection of goodness. And if you are a doubter, you can actually go online and find the science behind why this unlikely combination works and is so good.

But as great as the union of fry and frosty is, there is an even greater union that eclipses all the other examples that we could think of.

It is the union that was inaugurated and fulfilled in Christ when he reconciled and united us to Himself and made us his people.

But this union is more than two seemingly opposite objects coming together to create something good and new....**like the frosty fry.**

Instead, what God did through Christ was to literally change who we are so that we could be with him.

Ephesians 2:1-3 makes it clear that apart from Christ we were spiritually dead in our sin in which we were living as we followed Satan who is called the "prince of the power of the air."

We did whatever felt good to us, even though it dishonored God, and in the very essence of our nature, we were **children of wrath who deserved eternal punishment from God.**

As it says in 2 Thessalonians 1:9:

*[9] They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might,*

This is who we were, and this is where we were headed.

But then something happened. We see it right at the beginning of Ephesians 2:4 when it says "**But God.**"

Our triune God looked upon us living out our sin nature and on the path to destruction. But instead of hating or despising us, because he hates sin and evil, **it says that he is moved by the great love he has for us.**

And because he has such a great love for us, even though we clearly didn't deserve it, and even though we were dead in our sin, he sent his son Jesus Christ to die on our behalf and take our sin upon himself.

**In doing this a great exchange took place.**

Jesus took our sin nature and the wrath of the Father upon himself and in exchange he gave us freedom from the penalty and power of sin and he gave us his righteousness and right standing with God.

As it says in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

***[21] For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

We went from being by nature children of wrath to being new creations with a new nature of righteousness with God.

And the result of this transaction according to Ephesians 2 is that we are given a new and everlasting life just like Christ, and are now seated with him in the heavenly places.

**We are now and forever united with Christ, and right now can and are experiencing the blessings of that union.** As Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3:

***[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,***

Those blessings include things like adoption, hope, peace, joy, new life, and fellowship with God as we wait for the coming time when we will experience the riches of his good grace and power in an eternity with him.

And if you are here this morning and you have not put your trust in Christ as the one who can save you from the power and penalty of sin, can make you a new creation, and can give you a new and everlasting life with him, I urge you to come to him.

Come talk to me or one of the other elders and we would love to help you experience this new life and blessed union with Christ and all the heavenly benefits that he promises to us as his people.

If you are a believer here this morning, I urge you to rest and rejoice in the reality that your union with Christ is complete, and all of his benefits are yours today and for all eternity.

-----  
But also realize that Jesus came to do more than merely save and unite individual sinners to himself. Instead, **he came to create a whole new people group.**

## **2. Jesus created a new unified people (Eph 2:11-16)**

### **Ephesians 2:11–16**

***[11] Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— [12] remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth (citizenship) of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise (God’s covenants and promises made to Israel), having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. [14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in***

*his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances (requirements of the law), that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Now, before I get into these verses, if you didn't feel it already, scholars believe that this is one of if not the most theologically packed passage in all of scripture.

We could spend a ton of time unpacking all the elements of the law, ordinances, commonwealth, and the covenants of promise. But I don't have time to do that.

However, despite not taking a deep dive into this section I still think a simple reading of the text gives us a decent idea of what Paul is talking about.

We know that Paul has written this letter predominantly to Gentiles (non-Jews) who would be a part of the church in Ephesus which contains both Jews and Gentiles. Not only that, but we already know that Jesus has done a work in the lives of individual peoples, both Jews and Gentiles, so that they could be reconciled and united to him (Ephesians 2:1-7).

But now he begins this section not by focusing on their relationship or union with Christ, but by pointing to their relationship with the Jewish people themselves.

He says that these "gentiles in the flesh" or non-Jews by birth, were called "the uncircumcision" by the Jews.

They did this because circumcision was a big deal to the Jews, it set them apart as the people of God. Therefore, Jews didn't like Gentiles, saw them as lesser people, and used a derogatory term like "the uncircumcision" as a way to show that they were better.

The point is that there has always been a lot of hostility, anger, and animosity between Jew and Gentile throughout history.

Also, because the Gentiles were not a part of national Israel, they didn't have or understand the promise of the Messiah to come, they were not citizens of the nation of Israel, and they didn't have the covenants and promises of God, which means that they didn't have any hope of a Messiah or a new life with God.

They were separated from God which means that they were also separated from the Jews themselves.

But then in Ephesians 2:13 that all changes. It says, *[13] But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

Now, of course, Paul has in mind their union with God through Christ.

But here's the amazing thing. The gentiles being brought near and united with Christ also does something else. **It unites them with all of the Jews who also are believers in Christ.**

Two people groups who were former enemies are now one people who call each other brothers and sisters of the living God. As it says in verses 14-16:

*[14] For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility [15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances (requirements of the law), that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, [16] and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

Think about how this applies to us today. Now, I don't think we have any former or Messianic Jews in our congregation, but what we do have is one of the weirdest conglomerations of people that I have ever been a part of. **And I don't mean that in a bad way.**

But we have blue-collar, white-collar, doctors, construction workers, teachers, factory workers, old, young, introverts, extroverts, conservatives, liberals, car people, tech people, Dr. Who Nerds, MMA bros, Anime lovers, history buffs, Packers fans, Vikings fans, hikers, bikers, runners, readers, etc...

I bet if we spent time trying to parse through all of our differences, we could create quite an exhaustive list. **And the truth is that this weird group of people probably wouldn't get along with each other apart from the work of Christ.**

But God, in his goodness and mercy, and by his power, broke down the dividing wall that existed between us and united us on the most fundamental level. **He united us as his new people who are new creations united in Christ.**

No longer should we see each other as strangers, or enemies, or as people standing in the way of each other's desires or progress. Instead, we now must see each other as brothers and sisters and as a family who is willing to lay down our lives for one another, as Christ laid down his life for us. It's a family where we find both acceptance and peace in Christ and with one another.

But this family doesn't merely exist so we can have some friends, though friends are necessary and good.

Instead, God has brought us together for a greater and more grand purpose. As Paul writes in Ephesians 2:19-22:

*[19] So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.*

This is why we gather together, this is why we fellowship with one another, and this is the promised work that God is doing in and through us. He made us a unified new creation people in Christ so that we would grow together into a temple, a dwelling place for God, where he would be seen, adored, praised, feared, and believed.

**In this way, we are meant to be the visible manifestation of Christ and his kingdom to one another and to the world.**

Now, we could stop the sermon right here and ponder the reality of God's reconciling and unifying work of making us his new creation people. **And if we did that, we would never be able to exhaust the riches and value of what he has done.**

-----

But his unifying work and plan is bigger than us, because it extends beyond us to all creation both in heaven and on earth.

### **3. Jesus unites all things in himself (Eph 1:7-10)**

#### **Ephesians 1:7-10**

*[7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

I don't know how many of you have ever used a portable camcorder before, but if you were an adult before the invention of smartphones camcorders were the preferred method for taking video.

And each camcorder would have a zoom button on it where you could either slowly zoom in close while taking video or slowly zoom out to get a fuller picture of what is happening in the surrounding area.

As we have been going through Ephesians this morning, this message is meant to give us a slow zoom outward of God's great and grand plan. We started close with God's plan for uniting individual people to himself and then we moved out to see that God was actually reconciling a new and unified people to himself and to one another.

And now we are zooming out to the point where we get to see the full picture of what God is doing. That his plan for the whole of creation is to **unite everything in Christ.**

Now the word "unite" in Ephesians 1:10 can be confusing, but it means to **"sum up" or "bring something to a main point."**

**And the main point of everything in all creation is Christ.**

Peter O'Brien says it this way in his commentary on Ephesians: *"God's summing up of these entities (things in heaven and things on earth) in Christ is his act of bringing all things together in (and under the rule of) Christ." "Christ is...the one in whom God restores harmony to the universe."*

And we have already seen that God has done this for his people, that we are both united with Christ in the heavenly places and to each other.

But he is also doing a cosmic work to put all things under his rule, this includes all earthly and spiritual powers. Look with me at the following verses:



## **Ephesians 1:19-23**

*[19] and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might [20] that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, [21] far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. [22] And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, [23] which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

## **Colossians 1:19-20**

*[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

All the spiritual forces in the heavenly places whether good or bad, and all earthly powers and entities, including political powers, oppressive earthly leaders, tech giants, billionaires, and the church, are right now under the rule and reign of Christ.

And he is doing a work that will one day culminate when he returns when all things will be reconciled to him, will live under his rule and reign, and the harmony of the universe will be restored to the picture of Revelation 21:1-2 which says:

*[1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*

I hope that excites you this morning. I hope and pray that it gives us the confidence to trust that our triune God knows what he is doing and that there is a cosmic plan that we get to be a part of that is far greater than anything we can imagine.

And everything that God has for us from this day forward is working toward the fulfillment of that glorious plan. All of the toil, heartache, strife, and struggle of life under the sun are cosmically meaningful, not meaningless.

-----  
So now we have the full picture. We have been united in Christ and to one another as his new creation people so that we would show the world his greatness as he continues his work of restoring harmony to the universe. **And if this our job within the scope of God's great plan, then how is he calling us to live that out?**

## **4. We must live as a new unified people in Christ (Eph 4:1-6)**

### **Ephesians 4:1-6**

*[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to*



*your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Just as the first three chapters of Ephesians are packed full of the theological realities of unity in Christ, chapters 4-6 are full of the practical realities of what it means to live out that unity.

And Paul begins to unpack the practical aspects of unity by calling us to live in a manner that is worthy of our calling in Christ. **This includes things like humility, gentleness, patience, and loving one another despite our weaknesses and failure.**

And he wants us to do this so that we will maintain the unity which the Spirit has created in us as he, through Christ, knit us together as the people of God.

Again, we are to love and serve one another so that people would look at us and see and believe that there is a real, united, and glorious Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This is exactly what Jesus told his disciples in John 13:35:

***[35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

And what I want to do in our time left this morning is to give you a quick snapshot of Ephesians 4-6 and the ways that Paul is calling us to display who our God is as we live out this attitude of love and service to one another.

- First, he calls each one of us to use our gifts to build up the body of Christ until Christ returns (Eph. 4:7-14).
- We must speak the truth to one another in love so that we build each other up in faith (Eph. 4:15-16).
- We must deal with our anger and give no opportunity for the devil (Eph. 4:26-27).
- We must do our work honestly and give to those in need (Eph. 4:28).
- We must watch what we say so that our words build each other up (Eph. 4:29).
- We must let go of bitterness, anger, and malice, and must be quick to forgive each other (Eph. 4:31-32).
- We must run from sexual immorality, crude joking, and foolish speech (Eph. 5:3-4).
- We must not become partners in the works of evil and must seek to do what pleases the Lord (Eph. 5:7-10).
- We must seek to be wise and make the best use of time (Eph. 5:15-16).
- We must submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph. 5:21).
- Wives must submit to their husbands and husbands must sacrificially love their wives (Eph. 5:22-33).
- Children must honor and obey their parents and parents and especially fathers should not provoke their children to anger, but build them up in the Lord (Eph. 6:1-4).
- Workers must obey their bosses as servants of Christ, and bosses must lead their workers as servants of Christ knowing that they are not serving themselves but him (Eph. 6:5-9).

And we seek to do all of this remembering that our strength and power to live this out comes from Christ and not ourselves. As it says in Ephesians 6:10:

*[10] Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.*

We are needy of him and his Spirit in us to be able to display his greatness as a new creation people, and to stand against the evil forces that will come against us as we seek to do this.

But the glorious message of Ephesians is that in Christ the battle is already won. The unity of God's people, creation, and the universe are already achieved. And even though we don't see it yet, everything is at this moment, is under the rule and reign of Christ.

**So my call to each of us this morning is to live as a new unified people in Christ.** Love one another, serve one another, and use your gifts, your words, and your relationships to build up the body of Christ. Because our work of love and service here on earth has eternal value and purpose.

For God is using it to make himself known and to spread his kingdom, until the day that he returns and the harmony and unity of the universe is restored. **And on that day our faith will become sight, we will experience the full blessings of our union with Christ and each other, and we will receive the full and everlasting joy of our salvation.**

**Let's pray.**