

NOTE: This material has been supplied by Kevin McBride and the "City Reaching 101" Working Group of the City Impact Roundtable

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A UNITED CHURCH

Acts 4:31-35

- Scripture
- spirit filled
- prayer
- proclamation
- care for the poor

A. Spirit filled

-The Need for Pentecost

"The infilling of the Spirit of God whereby a group of dedicated followers were empowered to live, act and minister in a way beyond normal ability."

AC 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

AC 4:32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had.

AC 4:33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all.

AC 4:34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales

AC 4:35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

-they needed the filling of Spirit to be what God intended them to be

Phil 2:1-4

PHP 2:1 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,

PHP 2:2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

PHP 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

PHP 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

PHP 2:5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

PHP 2:6 Who, being in very nature " God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

PHP 2:7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature " of a servant, being made in human likeness.

PHP 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

PHP 2:9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

PHP 2:10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

PHP 2:11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

B. Common Faith

Acts 2:32- "God has raised this Jesus to life"

Irenaeus Against Heresies

"As I have already observed, the Church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet, as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth."¹

Early Church shared and defended a common faith

¹ Irenaeus. "*Irenæus Against Heresies, Chapter X*". Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 330-331.

C. Common Unity

Paul- church is already one in essence

EPH 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 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. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

John

“ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”
(John 17:21-23)

This is not a prescription for organizational unity, but a call to Christ's church that they are already one, as the Trinity is one, through the sacrifice of Christ and the application of His sacrifice to his people. Vernon Grounds summarizes this by writing,

“Because of the redemptive passion of Jesus Christ has secured and is daily securing the fulfillment of His own petition, all believers are already one; they are one in the sole way that our Saviour asked for unity. They may not be one organizationally, but they are one organically. They may not be one structurally, but they are one spiritually. They may not be one visibly, but they are one vitally. And that- and that alone, I venture to assert- is the burden of our great High Priest's intercession.”²

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A UNIFIED CHURCH

² Vernon Grounds, *The Dynamics of Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press 1963), 16.

A. Early Church Preserved the faith

"I have confidence of you in the Lord, that ye will be of no other mind. Wherefore I write boldly to your love, which is worthy of God, and exhort you to have but one faith, and one kind of preaching, and one Eucharist. For there is one flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ; and His blood which was shed for us is one; one loaf is also broken to all {the communicants}, and one cup is distributed among them all; there is but one altar for the whole Church, and one bishop, with the presbytery and deacons, my fellow-servants. Since, also, there is but one unbegotten Being, God, even the Father; and one only begotten Son, God, the Word and man; and one Comforter, the Spirit of truth; and also one preaching, and one faith, and one baptism; and one Church which the holy apostles established from one end of the earth to the other by the blood of Christ, and by their own sweat and toil, it behoves you also, therefore, as "a peculiar people, and a holy nation," to perform all things with harmony in Christ."³

-harmony between brethren became a test for faith

"Each city, therefore, had a college of presbyters, consisting of pastors and teachers. For they all performed to the people that office of teaching, exhorting, and correcting, which Paul enjoins on bishops, (Tit. 1: 9;) and that they might leave a seed behind them, they made it their business to train the younger men who had devoted themselves to the sacred warfare. To each city was assigned a certain district, which took presbyters from it, and was considered as it were incorporated into that church."⁴

-church trained the next generation and assigned areas of the cities in which to minister

B. Early Church cared for the poor

In *The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark, he makes the case that by the time of Constantine's conversion, Christianity had become the predominant religion of the

³ Ignatius. "*Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*", Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. vol.1 (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999) ,81.

⁴ John Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes*, trans. John Allen, Book IV Chapter IV.(Philadelphia:Westminster Press,), 335.

known Roman Empire⁵. The early church accomplished this by caring for those in society that no one else would have. They cared for the unwanted children, the women. When a plague would strike a city, the Christians would stay while the rich fled. It was an attitude and mindset unknown in the Roman world and baffled the leaders of the day. Aristides, a philosopher of the time writes to the pagan leaders regarding Christians;

"They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them and they love one another. They despise not the widow, and grieve not the orphan. He that hath, distributes liberally to him that hath not. If they see a stranger, they bring him under their roof, and rejoice over him, as if he were their own brother. And if there is among them a man that is poor and needy, and they have not an abundance of necessaries, they fast two or three days that they may supply the needy with their necessary food."⁶

C. Early Church Proclaimed

"Christianity did not grow because of miracle working in the marketplaces (although there may have been much of that going on), or because Constantine said it should, or even because the martyrs gave it credibility. It grew because Christians constituted an intense community, able to generate an invincible determination. And the primary means of its growth was through the united and motivated efforts of the growing numbers of Christian believers, who invited their friends, relatives and neighbors to share the "good news."⁷

APPLICATION

"The early church didn't spend a great deal of time in pursuit of programs and unity, they understood they were tied together in a life of death eternal struggle. They lived

⁵ Rodney Stark. *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper: San Francisco 1997), 10-11. Stark estimated that Christian population could have conceivably been about 33 million by the year 350AD. This would have been a majority in an estimated population of 60 million by the time of Constantine's conversion.

⁶ Aristides. Quoted in Ronald Sider. *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1979), 108-109.

⁷ Stark, 208.

through their persecution and knew they needed each other. They found their commonality in their sacrificial ministry together, never altering their message, and centered in the simple principles of prayer, care for the poor and proclamation."

A NEW ORGANIZATIONAL PARADIGM

PRAYER

- Amsterdam Conference
- 1847 Jeremiah Lanphier
 - Dutch Reform church on Fulton Street

Question- "When does intentional, corporate, strategic prayer occur in the life of our churches

- Transformation Video
- "See You on the Green"
- Corporate Worship (youth and adult)
- Solemn Assembly Prayer

PASTORAL CARE AND SUPPORT

- moral accountability
- affirm long-term pastorships
- minister's fellowship

PROCLAMATION

- finding opportunities for corporate evangelism
 - targeting interest groups
 - one time each year

POOR

- active involved service to the community

PLANTING

PRESERVATION

- Maintaining and informing on theological issues
- provide opportunities for training
- public propaganda

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