

6. UNIFYING WORSHIP

Thesis: Christian oneness is dependent upon the public means of grace.

I. Unified through God's Speech to Us

"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42).

*"The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments, are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults."*¹

A. Oneness through His Audible Word (sermons)

"And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate....Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard....They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading" (Neh. 8:1-8).

"And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:11-13).

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:15-16).

*"The church, having received this preaching and this faith, although scattered throughout the whole world, yet as occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart: and she proclaims and teaches them, and hands them down with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth."*²

*"It has been the great object of my zeal [in preaching] to inculcate upon you the grand essentials of our holy religion, and to make you sincere, practical Christians....unless I succeed in this, I labor to very little purpose, though I should presbyterianise the whole colony!"*³

B. Oneness through His Visible Word (sacraments)

"For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13).

"Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17).

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 4.1.12.

² Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.2.

³ Samuel Davies quoted in Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America: An Historical Account of the Development of American Religious Life*, 3rd ed. (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1981), 81.

“How sad it is that there should be so many divisions in the church about sacraments, which are the seals of unity and communion.”⁴

“The unity and the koinonia that marked the apostolic church were powerfully reinforced every time believers gathered in a communion of hearts and minds to observe the Lord’s Supper.”⁵

II. Unified through Our Speech to God

“After this 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!’” (Rev. 7:9-10).

A. Oneness through Our Praise (songs)

“But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise” (Ps. 79:13).

“...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (Eph. 5:19).

“In large measure the worship wars are really wars about singing, with sides divided between ‘traditionalists,’ who defend hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and advocates of ‘contemporary music,’ who insist on the use of [modern] praise songs.”⁶

“Congregational singing acts as a sort of communal preaching.”⁷

B. Oneness through Our Prayers (supplications)

“Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven...Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil’” (Matt. 5:9-13).

“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers” (Acts 1:14).

“I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf” (Rom. 15:30).

“The only person in the New Testament who actually addresses God as his Father using the first person singular pronoun is the Lord Jesus himself. The Lord’s Prayer teaches us to use the first person plural when we speak to God—our Father. This in turn creates in us a deep-seated instinct that we come to him as members of his family, not as isolated individuals.”⁸

“As we spend time together in concentrated prayer, a divine community emerges. Everyone becomes aware that the Spirit is active, bringing life to our work, shaping our plans, and leading us.”⁹

⁴ Anthony Burgess, *Advancing Christian Unity*, ed. Matthew Vogan (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2019), 49.

⁵ Luder G. Whitlock Jr., *Divided We Fall: Overcoming a History of Christian Disunity* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 27.

⁶ D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2002), 161.

⁷ Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2020), 155.

⁸ Sinclair B. Ferguson, *Devoted to God’s Church: Core Values for Christian Fellowship* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2020), 128-29.

⁹ Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Church: Becoming a People of Hope in a Discouraging World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2023), 185.