

# Unified around what?

## Ephesians 4:4-6

Theme: the essence of unity

FCF: pluralism

Point: lasting unity can only be found in Christ

App: unify around the gospel

our cultural context

Our culture has a love/hate relationship with unity. Illustr: darwin, real men, born-again pagan, co-exist<sup>1</sup>

We want to be friends without any challenges: “co-exist, tolerance, diversity, etc”

Culture: unify around our differences.

proposition

What commonality doesn't unify, differences will tear apart.

text

## The One True God

The Trinity is the center of our unity

one body, baptized into Christ, by the Spirit, subsumed by the Father

## His work of salvation

one baptism - unto death

We're incorporated into the death of the Son, by the baptism of the Spirit, as predestined by the Father.

## Our beliefs in Him

one faith - core doctrines<sup>2</sup> (not an exhaustive list)

Ephesians 4:13 (HCSB)

until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

Jude 3

“...the faith that was delivered to the •saints once for all”

## The universal church...

...are believers throughout history who have been regenerated by God.

7 biblical characteristics of a local church: **AP!**

- doctrinal preaching (expositional preaching - *theological part II*)
- sacraments (baptism & Lord's supper)
- Biblical leadership that loves the church enough to practice church discipline
- generosity (money/time/resources)
- gathering (Lord's day)
- prayer
- mission

--> worship.

All centered on a saving God. (Ephesus isn't written to combat, but...)

<sup>1</sup> Under their *Mission and Vision*, the CoExist foundation writes, “Firstly, while we recognize and celebrate the many connections between the Abrahamic faiths, we also acknowledge their differences and distinctiveness. We believe we learn more about ourselves and our own traditions by looking respectfully at others’. So Coexist is not just about good relations: it is also about exploring our own convictions and beliefs.” <http://www.coexistfoundation.net/en-gb/page/9/mission-and-vision.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Peter O'Brien notes that while πιστις can be subjective (faith being shown) or objective (subject of one's faith), Paul probably is referring to the objective “substance of one's faith, their common body of belief.” *PNTC: The Letter to the Ephesians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999) p.283

## Religious pluralism as a backdrop

Serapis<sup>3</sup> - a god constructed by Ptolemy for the launch of his empire

*Ptolemy's rise to power*

"What Ptolemy needed was a means of combining Greek and Egyptian religious traditions"<sup>4</sup>

motivation behind *Serapis*

So he commissioned a Greek master sculptor to construct a god who would appeal to all the eclectic people groups of the city.<sup>5</sup>

Greek: Zeus, Asclepius (healing), Cerberus (dog of the underworld)

Egyptian: Imhotep (healing), Osiris (netherworld)

*description of Serapis*

Serapis was a *people-pleaser*, a god who simultaneously satisfied the Greek desire for a king, and the Egyptian desire for a deity.<sup>6</sup>

Ptolemy creates a pluralistic god to bring unity to his people.<sup>7</sup>

This was the current context of Ephesus during Paul's time of writing.

Ptolemy's pluralism is as it is today... (wait, I don't worship statues!)

Timothy Keller

[an idol] is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give. (*Counterfeit Gods*. xvii)<sup>8</sup>

conflict

## Our idolatry

- money, power, sex, security, comfort
- false gods can be made out of anything. Our religion won't fix, but simply feed these appetites.

## Our pluralism

We build idols to satisfy our deepest desires,  
but when **one god won't work, we just create more.**

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.237

<sup>4</sup> Justin Pollard and Howard Reid. *The Rise and Fall of Alexandria: Birthplace of the Modern World*. (New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2006). 877

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 906 "Ptolemy not only had to call on the right people to support his idea but had to frame his new deity in a way that appealed to the eclectic audience of his new city. As such, the new god Serapis had to combine many of the best features of a number of gods."

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 906 "To the Greeks he could easily be seen as a Greek god ruling an alien land, but to the Egyptians his outward appearance was simply a new manifestation of the age-old truths that Egyptians, and Egyptians alone, had always known."

<sup>7</sup> Macrobius wrote that "Following the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his successors (the Diadochoi) succeeded to the various parts of the empire, with the satrapy of Egypt being allotted to one of his generals. Ptolemy I Soter, the first of the Macedonian kings to rule Egypt (323-283 BC), introduced a new syncretistic god to provide Alexandria with a patron deity and unite the Greek and Egyptian population of the city." (*Metamorphoses*, XVII quoted in [http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia\\_romana/greece/paganism/serapis.html](http://penelope.uchicago.edu/~grout/encyclopaedia_romana/greece/paganism/serapis.html))

<sup>8</sup> Timothy Keller. *Counterfeit Gods*. xvii

Pluralism does not unify community, it dilutes it.

we allow our appetites to wreak havoc on others in a community

### Isaiah 44:14-20 (HCSB)

He cuts down cedars for his use, or he takes a cypress or an oak. He lets it grow strong among the trees of the forest. He plants a laurel, and the rain makes it grow. 15 It serves as fuel for man. He takes some of it and warms himself; also he kindles a fire and bakes bread; he even makes it into a god and worships it; he makes an idol from it and bows down to it. 16 He burns half of it in a fire, and he roasts meat on that half. He eats the roast and is satisfied. He warms himself and says, "Ah! I am warm, I see the blaze." 17 He makes a god or his idol with the rest of it. He bows down to it and worships; He prays to it, "Save me, for you are my god." 18 Such people do not comprehend and cannot understand, for He has shut their eyes so they cannot see, and their minds so they cannot understand. 19 No one reflects, no one has the perception or insight to say, "I burned half of it in the fire, I also baked bread on its coals, I roasted meat and ate. I will make something detestable with the rest of it, and I will bow down to a block of wood." 20 He feeds on ashes. His deceived mind has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself, or say, "Isn't there a lie in my right hand?"

You'll never make enough money to satisfy your insatiable hunger

You'll never make enough friends to satisfy your loneliness

You'll never have enough klout in the business world to justify your life

**False gods promise you everything, and never deliver.**

**They demand from you everything, and leave you with nothing.**

in the midst of a melting-pot of disappointing gods who can't transform,

Paul clarifies where the Church's peace and unity comes from...

The question: unified around what?? **AP!**

The answer: a Person and his redemptive work in us

### **We need something objective to hope in**

- Paul's imprisonment = to show you Jesus is worth it (READ Philippians 1:12-13)
  - when you get sick...you better have more to lean on than a cultural trend
  - when you lose your job...you better have something more than a "2-do" list to look back on
  - when your family is falling apart, you best have more than a self-help book from the NYT
  - when you plunge into sin, you better have more in your arsenal than "I'm gonna try harder"

The worldview of our day assumes humanity will gravitate towards unity if we "try harder"

- Christianity assumes our rebellious nature and need to be brought together

gospel

**This is ultimately what the world needs:** relationships to be reconciled to God in Christ.  
gov't, systems, corp, family, friend, spouse, etc.

**Lasting unity can only be found in Christ alone.**

Stop looking for peace in the cheap buffet of finger-foods that culture offers you.

You need a meal: Christ's body broken for you. Christ's blood spilt for you.