

"The fundamental unity of the church is invisible and intangible. It is an inward unity that comes with belief in the gospel. This observation does not imply that outward, visible unity is unimportant. Outward unity, however, can be enjoyed only where inner unity already exists. In sum, unity is always a function of what unites. Fellowship always involves something that is held in common. The quality of the thing held in common determines the quality of the fellowship or unity. The thing that is held in common by all Christians—the thing that constitutes the church as one church—is the gospel itself. Belief in the gospel is how people follow Jesus. Belief in the gospel is how people are Spirit-baptized into the one body. Consequently, the gospel is the essential ground of all genuinely Christian unity. Where the gospel is denied, no such unity exists. Even the most minimal Christian unity depends on common belief in the gospel." (Kevin Bauder, p. 23)

"What Christians ought to hold in common is not merely the gospel, but the whole counsel of God. Wherever Christians differ over some aspect of the whole counsel of God, their fellowship is in fact frustrated. They should not be surprised to discover that this may limit their ability to work together....Differences over the faith always affect fellowship, but they affect it to varying degrees. All other things being equal, cooperation and organization should be maintained wherever the differences do not preclude it....Sometimes, however, a difference is sufficiently serious that it cannot be ignored. When that happens, conflict becomes inevitable at some level. Under such circumstances, greater harmony and outward unity may be maintained by separate organization." (Kevin Bauder, pp. 36-37)

We should strive to be people who are peacemakers...

...pursuing avoiding hostility, conflict, strife, and division

...pursuing clarity and priority on what genuinely unites us

...pursuing care and respect on where we are legitimately different

...pursuing humility and holiness, not pride and sin

Sunday, September 14, 2025
Danny Capon, *Pastor*

A Theology of Disagreement

No. 7 | Unity and Disagreement

Selected Scriptures

Review

A Theology of Disagreement

We can disagree about what **is** (reality).
We can disagree about what it **means** (interpretation).
We can disagree about what is **right** (righteous).
We can disagree about what is **best** (wisdom).
We can disagree about what we should **care** about (values).
We can disagree about what we should **want** (desires).
We can disagree about what we are **okay** with (submission).

- A disagreement is a situation in which two parties do not have the same opinion.
- A disagreement occurs, most observably, because no two parties are exactly the same and both parties are naturally morally corrupt.
- A disagreement may not initially be morally consequential or result in immoral conduct between two parties.
- A disagreement may also start out immorally by one or both parties, and proceed quickly to conflict or a range of other relationally-charged actions.

Unity and Disagreement

How does unity contribute to our understanding and handling of disagreement?

To what degree does unity operate in all our (matters of) agreement and disagreement? To what degree *should* unity operate in both?

truth
unity

What is unity?

"Unity and fellowship do not exist in themselves. They are byproducts of something else. Unity is always a function of something that unites. Fellowship...means joint ownership. Properly speaking, fellowship involves something that two or more persons hold in common." (Kevin Bauder, p. 21)

Examples of Unity:

The Triune God = "I and the Father are **one**" (John 10:30)

Husband and Wife = "...they shall become **one** flesh" (Matthew 19:5)

How shall we understand unity?

- Jesus's plan: John 10

ESV **John 10:14** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be **one flock, one shepherd.** ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

- Jesus's prayer: John 17

ESV **John 17:20** "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ 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. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, **that they may be one even as we are one,** ²³ 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. ²⁴ 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. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ 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."

- Believers: We are one with God and one with each other

ESV **Romans 5:1** Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

ESV **Romans 12:4** For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

- Differences: Sameness isn't required and differences aren't eliminated

ESV **Galatians 3:28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- Oneness: Oneness isn't sameness and it isn't division

ESV **Romans 12:3** For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

ESV **1 Corinthians 12:14** For the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of

smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

- Unity: It is both identity and practice

ESV **Ephesians 4:1** 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.

Then, what do we see in vv. 7-16 and vv. 17-32?!

ESV **Philippians 2:1** So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, ² complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³ Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Then, what do we see in vv. 5-11 and vv. 12-18?!

How is unity related to disagreement?

"...eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Our normal course of action...

ESV **1 Corinthians 1:10** I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

ESV **Philippians 1:27** Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, ²⁸ and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

- Uniting over matters that don't unite us
- Prioritizing matters of difference over our essential oneness
- Moving away from the center of our oneness instead of towards it
- Minimizing the boundaries of our oneness instead of maximizing them