

The Body Fitly Joined Together

(1) United in the Truth

What would you consider to be the “glue” of the church? Have you ever given thought to why exactly it is that you, as a young person, live in unity and blessed fellowship with your family and friends in the church? Have you ever wondered why your parents, in the consciousness of church unity, would use up so much money and time to teach you the Word of God and send you to schools that would do the same? Have you ever observed with amazement the selfless and sacrificing life of hard work put forth by your pastors and teachers on behalf of the body of Christ? In an individualistic age, we might be tempted to utter one simple word: “why?”

Lord willing, I intend to write a brief series concerning the church of Jesus Christ. As young people, we must examine how it is that we fit into this body and how we are to relate with other members. In this first article I would like to go about answering the inquiry above—“why?” In the next article we will consider how we as young people can compare ourselves to one another, and how living a life of comparisons can be damaging to the body of Christ. In a couple following articles I hope to address the place of members, whom we judge to be weaker, in the church.

Fellowship and unity among members of the church rests upon the knowledge of Jesus Christ (Col. 2:2; Phil. 1:27). Paul, by the inspiration of the Spirit, writes in Ephesians 4:13: “...we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God...” The Belgic Confession, article 27, brings out an even more striking aspect of this unity as it relates to this knowledge: “Furthermore, this holy church is not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world; and yet is joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same spirit.” How amazing! The church in this world can be found in many different places, cultures, and walks of life, from the plantations of Brazil to the arid deserts of Saudi Arabia; from the towering skyscrapers of New York to the humble abode of the hut-dweller. Yet, that unifying knowledge of Jesus Christ lives in each and every believer’s heart. Although seemingly separated by a thousand different factors, the catholic church lives as one body in this truth.

This knowledge or truth of God in Jesus Christ is opposed today. We live in an age that despises doctrine. Our world does not have the time to sit down and learn about who Jesus Christ is and what he has done. Such doctrine, according to the world, and even reformed churches, is dry and boring. “Tell us,” they cry, “that Jesus loves us; that is all we need to know.” Love, however, is rooted in knowledge. By doctrine we

increase in our love of God. Doctrine reveals to us our great God and how he has sent his Son to die for miserable sinners! As young people, we must swim against the currents of the world's thinking concerning this knowledge. Let us love doctrine! Let us never allow doctrine to become anything less than the lively, awesome, and exciting truth of our almighty God!

This truth about God in Jesus Christ is vital for the life and unity of the church—both history and our own experience demonstrate this. When we, in our spiritually weak moments, become disillusioned with doctrine, let us think on those who have sacrificed so much so that the church could be unified in the truth. Remember the church fathers who labored tirelessly to maintain right doctrine. Remember those throughout church history who were mercilessly burned at the stake, thrown to the lions, and separated from family and friends for the sake of this precious knowledge. Remember those, like Rev. Herman Hoeksema, who held this knowledge in such high regard that he was willing to jeopardize his career and ruin many relationships to maintain it faithfully. Remember your father and mother who loved this knowledge so much that they forsook many earthly pleasures to pay for Christian schools and maintain a godly household. What a dreadful and arrogant thing it is to despise doctrine and the unity it brings.

Young people, do you and I *love* doctrine? If we do, this will bring out a number of things in our lives. Because we understand the absolute importance of this truth to the fellowship and unity of the church, we are careful to choose good friends. The teenage years are critical. With whom will you share your time? God is praised when we make friends with those who share our love for the truth. Doctrinal agreement and mutual love for the truth of God's word must not simply be one aspect of a friendship, but *the defining* aspect of a friendship. Because we must constantly strive to know God in the purest way possible, and because this completely defines our thinking, we will make sure that love for God trumps every other quality we may seek in others—looks, personality, intelligence, humor, etc. Making friendships with unbelievers places a stress on our unity with the body of Christ. What about dating? Since doctrine reigns at the center of our lives, we ought to ask our boyfriend or girlfriend, right away in the relationship, what he or she believes—whether we think we know or not. Christ must be at the center of any relationship, and love for him demands that Christian couples agree on doctrine first and foremost.

How thankful we may be for this unity in the truth as it is found specifically in the Protestant Reformed Churches. I know that I am often guilty of taking this unity for granted. Many of us were brought up in this environment—unity in doctrine is nothing new to us. Let us never take it for granted! A few weeks ago, a generous person from my church gave me bound volumes of the *Standard Bearer* which go all the way back to 1993. As I paged through the volumes, I was amazed at the doctrinal

consistency and faithfulness to the truth over the years—and that is just a small example of unity in doctrine. Think of all the other blessings that unite us as a denomination: faithful preaching that makes the sheep strong; a wonderful catechism program that nourishes the lambs; countless reformed books that sound out God’s Word; many hours around the supper table reading Scripture. In a day of spiritual drought and apostasy, my head spins when I think of the oasis we live in. The Protestant Reformed Churches have and continue to experience these undeserved blessings from the head of the universal church, Jesus Christ. Indeed, blessed agreement in the knowledge of our head, Jesus Christ, is that glue which holds the church together, both in the PRC and in the church universal.

All of grace! Lest we young people become proud of our heritage, let us always remember those three words. What a dreadful contradiction we make in our lives if we boast of our denominational unity in the truth, for we confess that we are saved by grace. When we witness to others of the truth, we must not proudly present our position, nor should we stubbornly refuse to listen to others when they tell us their views—such actions arise out of pride. As those who sit under the preaching twice a Sunday, sit under years and years of catechism, and for many, attend Christian schools, the question is not whether you and I know our doctrine—we know it; but learning to witness that precious and great knowledge to others in *humility* takes work. Young people who humbly speak of this doctrine and adorn their lives with it are a powerful witness in God’s hand to show others what it means to walk in the unity of the truth.

Remember, too, that such unity in the truth does not come without work. Church unity is all of grace, but God also calls us to work out of thankfulness for what he has given. Sadly, very sadly, we observe some denominations that have abandoned the truth to accept a watered-down, indeed, lower-case, truth. The young people die spiritually for lack of knowledge. Shepherds do not feed their sheep. Parents do not provide a spiritual foundation for their children. The results can be seen all around. Doctrinal disagreement and disunity splits families and churches—just ask a person alive in 1953. Do not think for a moment that this could not happen in our generation! Pray that God will continue to faithfully bless us. Pray that God will work in your and my heart a zeal for the Word and the doctrine contained in it, and that he will raise us up to be strong elders, deacons, pastors, society leaders, singles, fathers, mothers, and workers in the church.

Working for unity in the truth especially comes through reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word. When we have such a zeal for the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, we want to read all about it. We will then strive, despite the demands on our time from school, work, Facebook, and recreation, to reserve time in our day to read and memorize Scripture; we will read solidly reformed literature; we will take

time to meditate upon the greatness of God and his wonder-work of salvation in Christ; we will pray to our great God daily as part of our relationship of friendship with him in Christ. A denomination full of young people who are disinterested or bored by reading this kind of solid material is a denomination in grave trouble. God uses reading so that his people might boldly, unashamedly, and uncompromisingly, yet humbly, speak in defense of the truth that they love.

Be assured: God will bless that church. Pray for that unity. Ask for that zeal for doctrine. Fall on your knees daily in total dependence upon God, the giver of that truth and unity. God will surely continue to give it.