

## Honoring Unity, Resisting Uniformity

Psalm 51:1-12; Ephesians 4:1-16

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How many of you recognize these words?

*I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth;  
And in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord.*

Recognize that? If you grew up in a Baptist church and have had little experience outside the Baptist church, you may not recognize those as the opening lines of the Apostles' Creed, the oldest creed of the Church, possibly dating back as early as 120 A.D. That's why it's called the Apostles' Creed. It is recited every Sunday in most mainline Protestant churches. Think Episcopalians, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, etc.

But Baptists don't recite the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed nor any of the other creeds of the church. We claim to have no creeds, and for good reason. It's not that we don't believe what the creeds say. I believe everything in the Apostles' Creed, except maybe that part about Jesus descending into hell. When people in our neighboring churches stand and in unison recite the creeds, they are saying, "This is where we find unity. This is what we collectively believe. We believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord."

Baptists do not recite the creeds because we choose not to find our unity in what we believe. We find our unity in what we do. What do we do? We do missions and evangelism. We rehab affordable housing. We feed hungry children during fall break and spring break. We welcome the international community. We provide a respite for families with a member with disability. And all the other things that we and other Baptists do. That's where we find unity—in what we do.

In a few weeks, we will start collecting food and money to feed every child in our of our Title 1 schools during fall break. We will bag enough food to feed about 450 students three meals per day for nine days. That's a lot of food and a lot of work. When we bag and deliver that food, people will be working shoulder to shoulder with each other, laughing, talking, and paying no attention to the fact that they may disagree on important issues facing the church today: immigration, same-sex marriage, ordination of women, etc. Do you know how Baptists, when we are at our best, deal with those kinds of differences? We say, "Let's feed the children. Let's find our unity in what we are doing and honor the priesthood of the others who are helping us."

That's the difference between unity and uniformity. Paul calls for "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That was important to Paul because he believed there is only "one body," one Church. That one body has many names—Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Church of God, Lutheran, and others—but there is only one Church. There's one Spirit, he said, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all. Therefore, he urged unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul never called for uniformity, where everyone is alike, everyone believes the same and everyone does the same. He even called attention to the diversity of the Church. Some were apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. The Church is a diverse collection of people. We sometimes believe differently about theological matters. We sometimes think differently about political or social issues. We may prefer different kinds of music or a different style of worship. That's okay because we find our unity in what we do. We can discuss and debate the other issues, and at the end of the day we honor the right of others to believe what they believe.

I realize that Baptists are not always Baptist when it comes to honoring unity and resisting uniformity. We are human, after all. So we need Paul to call us back to this critical, fundamental understanding of the nature of the Church. And we need this table. It stands at the center of our attention, the focal point of this community of faith, a constant reminder of what One *did* for us.

A Prayer of Confession is printed in your worship guide. Join me as we confess our sins together.