**Sermon Title:** One loaf, one body, one baptism:

How the Lord’s Supper and baptism contribute to unity in the body of Christ

**Sermon Text:** 1 Corinthians 10:17 and 1 Corinthians 12:13

**By Pastor Micah Adamson, September 1, 2013**

**Introduction:** Word and Sacrament are designed to unify the church but often end up dividing it

The sacraments, of the Lord’s Supper and Baptism, are designed to unite Christians together and to divide or separate us from the world. Unfortunately, our differences of opinion on the sacraments often end up dividing us from other Christians too. Today we are going to discuss how the sacraments are designed to unite Christians together, how the sacraments are designed to separate Christians from the world, and how most differences of opinion on the Sacraments should NOT divide Christians from other Christians. I don't want to downplay the importance of the differences about the Sacraments too much, but I do want to argue that most of the disagreements we have about the sacraments should NOT divide us since the sacraments are designed to unite the church. We can will see in 1 Corinthians ways that the sacraments are designed by God to unite us and we will see the ways that the Corinthians were using them as the source of divisions.

Many differences of opinion about the sacraments can be traced back to the time of the Reformation. The Nicene Creed is one of the earliest statements of faith from when Christianity first became legal in the Roman Empire. Protestants and Catholics agree on the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed says that Christians “believe in one, holy, catholic [universal], and apostolic Church”. The Roman Catholic definition of the church as universal meant doing and believing what all Christians, everywhere currently do and believe. If you don’t do and believe the same things as the church teaches today, you aren't in the catholic or universal church. This is based on the belief that the apostles left their authority with the church to determine what is true. The Protestant Reformation definition of church as universal meant doing and believing what all real Christians everywhere and at all times had done and believed. If you don't believe the same things as the apostles believed, then you aren't in the catholic or universal church. This is based on the belief that the apostles left their authority written down in the Bible to determine what is true and anytime the church gets off track it needs to be reformed.

Protestants and Catholics agreed that the fact that the church is universal is both inclusive and exclusive. The universal church includes everyone who Jesus includes, but it also exclude everyone who Jesus excludes. We can't be 100% accurate about who is in the universal church, all we can do is look at scripture and try to make our practice match. Preaching the gospel and correctly observing the Sacraments (including church discipline about who is allowed to receive the sacraments) are the marks that unify the church and divide it from the world. You can accurately preach the gospel without having a church, but you can't correctly practice the sacraments without having a church. At the time of the Reformation both Protestants and Catholics agreed that they had deep enough real disagreements about the gospel in regard to the sacraments that it warranted dividing over the issue. Both sides formally excommunicated the other side and we still speak of them as divided communions today.

But, differences over the sacraments are not just Protest vs. Catholic differences; Protestants disagree with each other about the sacraments too. Today I want to focus Paul’s argument from 1 Corinthians about what things should and should NOT be allowed to divide us as Christians. For now I’m just going to list some of the things which Christians disagree on: the name, number, mode and methods, meaning, and who should participate in the sacraments. Then next week I want to look at the specific scripture passages regarding some of these differences in greater depth to show why I think most of the common differences among Protestants over the sacraments should NOT divide us.

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are called either called “ordinances” or “sacraments”. Calling them ordinances refers to things that Jesus ordered Christians do and puts a stronger emphasis on our doing these things. Calling them Sacraments refers to holy or sacred things that set us apart as Christians and puts a stronger emphasis on God doing these things. Almost everyone refers to baptism as baptism, which is a transliteration of the Greek word “baptizo” which means “to dip in or under” or “to immerse”. The Lord’s Supper is also called communion (meaning union and participation with Christ and the church), the Eucharist (meaning gratitude) and the Mass (which means the part of the service that comes right before you are dismissed and sent out into the world).

The Roman Catholic Church has seven sacraments: Baptism, the Eucharist (communion), Penance (confession), Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders (ordination), Anointing of the Sick (last rights). Protestant churches only recognize two sacraments in the Bible: Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

Different churches baptize by sprinkling or immersion, dipping or sprinkling once or once for each member of the Trinity, in private in the church or in a public place, in a river or standing water, believers only or believers and the infant children of believers.

Different church celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly, monthly, or quarterly, with grape juice or wine, leavened or unleavened bread, one cup and loaf or individual cups and pieces of bread, seated or coming forward, eating as the elements arrive or holding them to eat together, eating yourself or being fed/served by a leader, have public or private confession first, have open communion or only allow members to eat, and require baptism before communion or not.

The main disagreement over the meaning of the sacraments ranges from seeing the sacraments as completely real to completely symbolic, and everything in between One extreme would say that the sacraments work in and of themselves regardless of if a person has faith. The other extreme says that the sacraments are just symbolic and don’t do anything at all even with faith. The middle position would see the sacraments as signs and seals that are more than just symbols but less than being effective on their own without faith in Christ.

The disagreement over believer and infant baptism is one of the main reasons why the reformation split between the Anabaptists on one side and the Lutherans and Calvinists on the other. Likewise, the disagreement over how Jesus is present in the Lord's Supper is one of the main reasons why the reformation split between the Calvinists and Lutherans, both of whom disagreed with the Anabaptists who said that the Lord's Supper is completely symbolic, and all of whom disagreed with the Roman Catholic position on the Mass.

**Overview of what Baptism and the Lord’s Supper mean:** Signs and Seals of the Gospel

As we have seen there are a lot of things Christians disagree about regarding the sacraments. But, there are some things that are clear from scripture about the meaning of the sacraments that almost all Christians would agree on. These things which are signified by the sacraments form the basis for how the Lord's Supper and Baptism contribute to unity in the body of Christ. The central truths that Baptism and the Lord’s Supper affirm make up the truths of the gospel itself. By participating in the sacraments together, we affirm that these gospel truths are true and that they are true of us together as the body of Christ.

I hope that you notice the way that the sacraments work in our priority one relationship with God through helping us be more amazed at how good the gospel of Jesus is. I also hope that you notice the effect on our priority three relationships since the Lord's Supper and Baptism both proclaim the truth of the gospel to the world. But, I want to focus your attention today specifically on how the sacraments relate to our priority two relationship as the church.

Please note that Baptism is not the Lord's Supper but the two are closely connected in the Bible and have lots of similarities. Likewise Baptism is not circumcision and the Lord's Supper is not Passover but these two pairs are also connected in the Bible and have a lot of similarities.

*Overview of what baptism means:*

1. Faith in the Triune God ...and the related idea of repentance from the sin that is under God's judgment and from which we trust Jesus died to save us (Matthew 28:19, Mark 1:4, Acts 2:38, 19:4-5, Mark 16:16, Acts 8:37, 1 Peter 3:20-21, 1 Corinthians 10:2).
2. Cleansing from sin (1 Peter 3:21, Acts 22:16)
3. Union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection - Jesus was baptized for us and was circumcised and cut off completely for us (Romans 6:1-4, Colossians 2:11-14, Matthew 3:14-15)
4. Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:11, Acts 2:41, Acts 10:47, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:4-6)
5. Inclusion in the family of God (Matthew 28:19, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:4-6, Colossians 2:11-14, Genesis 17:10-11, Exodus 12:43-49, Leviticus 12:3, Galatians 3:26-29)

*Overview of what the Lord's Supper means:*

1. Faith in Jesus’ death at His first coming which secures His triumph at His second coming ...and the related idea of repentance from the sin that is under God's judgment and from which we trust Jesus died to save us (John 6:35-40,53-58, Matthew 26:26-29).
2. Jesus’ blood shed on the cross and body broken in death for the forgiveness of our Sin – The Lord’s Supper proclaims this truth to the world and thanks God for it (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Matthew 26:26-29, Luke 22:15-20, Mark 14:22-24)
3. Participation in the New Covenant blessings and curses - Passover meal was a sacred assembly (1 Corinthians 5:11-13, 10:16-17, 11:27-31, Matthew 26:26-29, Leviticus 23:2, 2 Chronicles 30:1, 35:18-19, Exodus 24:6-8, Jeremiah 31:31-34)
4. Life from Jesus through the Spirit who lives in us (John 4:10-14, 6:35-40,53-58, John 7:37-39, 1 Corinthians 12:13)
5. Inclusion in the family of God and a place at the table at the banquet in the Kingdom of God – eating and drinking from one loaf and one cup shows that there is only one Christ and one church (Matthew 26:26-29, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Revelation 19:9, Matthew 8:11)

*Overview of good and bad types of unity in 1 Corinthians: The context for today’s sermon texts*

**1** *Divisions in the Church*

Paul discusses how baptism was being used as a source of division based on who baptized you.

**2** *Wisdom From the Spirit*

**3** *On Divisions in the Church*

Paul compares the church to a building, with Jesus as its foundation, and leaders as its builders. He admits that some leaders are better at building the church than others, but as long as they aren’t trying to destroy the building or replace Jesus as the foundation, we shouldn’t judge them too harshly. God is the final judge since He is the owner and resident who lives in the church by His Spirit.

**4** *Apostles of Christ*

**5** *Expel the Immoral Brother!*

Paul says that in contrast to the bad kinds of division that are developing in Corinth, there is actually a bad kind of unity developing at Corinth too. They are proud that their congregation includes the unrepentantly immoral. Paul argues that since Passover was a time of unleavened bread and Jesus was sacrificed for us as our Passover lamb then when we eat together we need to sweep out the sin in our lives as the Israelites got rid of yeast. The fact that Paul is talking in Passover language here and the Lord’s Supper was instituted by Jesus at Passover is a strong argument that his command “With such a man [who is unrepentantly immoral] do not even eat” is referring to eating the Lord’s Supper together.

**6** *Lawsuits Among Believers*

The Corinthians had another bad type of divisions. They were filing lawsuits against each other. Paul reminds the Corinthians of how evil they really are without Jesus and reminds them how much they have been forgiven of as a source of unity. We should have unity with repentant sinners; that’s what Christians are. We should not have unity with unrepentant sinners.

*Sexual Immorality*

Paul turns again to another bad kind of unity, sexual union between a Christian and a prostitute. Paul doesn’t argue that we must avoid sin because we lose our union with Christ when we sin, instead he says that the reason Christians should be separate from the world is that we are united to Christ.

**7** *Marriage*

Paul then has to clarify how far this separation from the world should go by addressing another bad form of disunity. Paul says that even though Christians should not knowingly marry unbelievers, once a Christian is married to an unbeliever it is a valid marriage. Christians should not separate from their unbelieving spouses or give up on their children. Paul argues that the Christian spouse sets the unbelieving spouse and child apart and we don’t know if will come to faith in Jesus by being a part of a family with a Christian spouse and parent.

**8** *Food Sacrificed to Idols*

Paul turns to another bad kind of unity and another bad kind of disunity. Paul argues that sacrificing food to idols doesn’t make it unclean in and of itself, like prostitution, but since we are united to other Christians who have different convictions, our union with them should cause us to separate from even things in the world that aren’t wrong in and of themselves.

**9** *The Rights of an Apostle*

Paul says that there is even a good kind of unity with being like unbelievers to help share the gospel with them. But, we have to be careful not to take this too far. As Christians, we aren’t actually under the law nor are we free to disobey God.

**10** *Warnings From Israel’s History*

Paul covers another good kind and bad kind of unity. Baptism and the Lord’s Supper unite us; but sin can also unite us. All Israelites were united under the cloud and by being saved through the Red Sea in a way that Paul compares to baptism. Then Paul says they were united by eating the same bread from heaven (manna) and drinking the same water from the rock (Jesus), just as we do. But this unity wasn’t enough to keep them from God’s judgment since they were also united in their sins of idolatry, immorality, and complaining rather than allowing their faith in God to define their unity.

*Idol Feasts and the Lord’s Supper*

Paul now specifically addresses how the Lord’s Supper unites us and how we need to separate ourselves from idol feasts so that we are not united to the world. We participate in the body of Christ together by eating the Lord’s Supper together from one loaf. There is one loaf and we are one body who get our life from one source: Jesus. The danger of trying to be united to world and the devil by participating in idol worship by eating from that table is that the real God is a jealous God and a strong God. Not someone whose jealousy you want to provoke.

***1 Corinthians 10:17 (NIV84)*** *Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*

*The Believer’s Freedom*

The unity that we have by what we eat or drink anything should be unity with God for the good of other Christians and the world; The unity that we have by what we eat or drink should be unity around the three priorities.

**11** *Propriety in Worship*

*The Lord’s Supper*

Now we get to one of the strangest and saddest type of disunity at Corinth. There was disunity around the Lord’s Supper itself. They were turning something God intended to bring unity in Christ into a source of disunity. Some of the Corinthians were actually eating up all the bread and drinking up all the wine in the Lord’s Supper and getting drunk before everyone got there! Paul argues that this showed a lack for respect for Christ’s body, and it seems like he had two things in mind. First, Jesus said that the bread was His body broken for us and the wine was His blood shed for us. To misuse the Lord’s Supper is to disrespect the sacrifice of Jesus’ body on the cross. Second, Paul said that we who eat from the one loaf are one body; the body of Christ. To misuse the Lord’s Supper in a way that hurts other Christians is to disrespect Jesus’ body in the church. Paul again says that messing with God is not laughing matter. God killed people for disobeying Him in both the Old and New Testament, so we should take warning as we come so close to God at the Lord’s Supper. We need to come humbly admitting that we are united to each other as Christ’s body in love by our common faith that our only hope of being saved of our sin is Christ’s body given for us on the cross.

**12** *Spiritual Gifts*

The same God gives us different Spiritual gifts with the same purpose: to build us up as one body of Christ. Spiritual gifts were designed by God for unity.

*One Body, Many Parts*

***1 Corinthians 12:13 (NIV84****) For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.*

Different parts make up one body. Our unity in Christ is composed of diversity. Paul returns to baptism as a sign of our unity. The baptism that Paul is taking about here appears to be the Spiritual reality that water baptism symbolizes. We don't people baptize in the Holy Spirit, only Jesus does that. But, water baptism is a symbol of baptism in the Spirit. With all due respect to differences of opinion on this issue even in our own congregation, I don’t see any passage in the Bible where a person is baptized in the Spirit at any other time than when they come to faith in Christ. In Acts, people were filled with the Spirit many times, and in Ephesians 5:18, we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit at all times instead of being filled with wine, but we are only baptized in the Spirit once and for all into the body of Christ. Our baptism in water is a picture of this oneness and an argument against being baptized more than once.

**13** *Love*

Love is the fruit of the Spirit given to all Christians that is designed to functions as the glue that holds people together who have different gifts of the Spirit unique to different Christians.

**14** *Gifts of Prophecy and Tongues*

It sounds like the Corinthians were using their different gifts for disunity rather than unity. I don’t think that denominations are all bad, but one of the drawbacks of dividing into different denominations is that enables us to divide by spiritual gifts so that all of the mouths are in one place, all of the ears are in one place, and all of the hearts are in another. I enjoy the diversity of worshiping in a non-denominational church with different gifts and even different opinions about spiritual gifts. The goal of gifts is to build up the church.

*Orderly Worship*

Unity, order, and strengthening the church are all connected.

**15** *The Resurrection of Christ*

The ultimate thing that unites us as Christians is our common faith in the same good news about Jesus death and resurrection for our sin. The fact that Paul says he is passing on what he has heard, is a strong argument that this passage in 1 Corinthians 15 is actually the earliest church creed, like the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed. Short summary statements about the facts of the gospel are excellent ways to remind us about what unites us as Christians. Creeds are also good ways to divide us from groups that don’t believe the gospel. Reading a copy of the Nicene Creed to people who come to your door is a fast way to find out if they are from a cult or not. It also provides one of the best areas of things to focus on in your conversations with them since they are gospel issues. The Bible is a big book; all of it is equally true but not all of it is of equal gospel importance. Creeds help us focus on what is most important as Paul does here.

*The Resurrection of the Dead*

All people on earth are united in the fact that we all die in Adam. We are united as Christians in that we were all raised from the dead in Jesus. Baptism is a picture of this.

*The Resurrection Body*

**16** *The Collection for God’s People*

Another way that we are united as Christians is in giving to each other as we are in need. The fact that Paul moves directly to this topic is one of the reasons that Christians have long felt that it is appropriate to take a benevolence offering along with a communion service. On a side note, the fact that Paul closes with a command to greet each other with a holy kiss is why many churches include a greeting of sharing Christ’s peace at the end of their communion services. Paul concludes his letter with a strong statement of both unity and disunity. He sends his love and the grace of our Lord Jesus to fellow believers in Christ, and a curse to anyone who does not love the Lord. Paul also prays to the Lord Jesus asking Him that He would come soon. This is in keeping with a discussion about the Lord’s Supper too since we are supposed to proclaim Jesus death until he comes.

**Valid and Invalid reasons for disunity:** Al Mohler’s three levels of Christian disagreements

I have been helped by Al Mohler’s categorizing all Christian disagreements into three levels. The “first level” of disagreement is about matters of the gospel itself; these are valid reasons for disunity since if we disagree about these issues, we can’t really even call each other Christians. Paul said:

***Galatians 1:8 (NIV84)***

*Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned.*

Cults clearly fit this category, and at the time of the reformation Protestants and Catholics believed they had a first level disagreement. The “second level” of disagreement is between Christians who agree about the gospel but disagree about significant matters that would likely prevent a local church from working together as one body; these are valid reasons for limited disunity but shouldn’t keep two local churches from working together in the same town and encouraging one another. Mohler argues that by reducing unnecessary conflict, having different denominations can actually help us be more unified. The “third level” of disagreement includes issues that almost every individual Christian has different convictions or opinions about; these issues would be invalid reasons for disunity. For instance, disagreements about the finer points of eschatology should not be treated the same as disagreements about the gospel, or even be treated the same as disagreements about baptism or the Lord’s Supper.

According to Al Mohler’s three levels of Christian disagreements, non-gospel issues are invalid reasons for disunity even in disagreements about baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Only first level gospel issues should be allowed to divide us. Mohler allows for non-gospel disagreements about baptism and the Lord’s Supper to be the basis for forming different denominations so that we don’t have an argument over baptism and the Lord’s Supper every week. But, I appreciate that here at New Heights we treat non-gospel differences about baptism and the Lord’s Supper as third level disagreements as much as possible. For example, we practice believer baptism but allow people to become full members and leaders who were only baptized as infants as long as they believe the gospel and have convictions about infant baptism. I think that God is honored by this choice for unity in the body of Christ.

According to 1 Corinthians it appears that being unwilling to believe the gospel or being unwilling to repent of sin or the only valid reasons to divide over the sacraments. Being unwilling to believe the gospel can take the form of looking even to the sacraments to save us instead of Jesus. Being unwilling to repent of sin can take the form of not confessing that we are sinners to begin with, or pretending that our own current or favorite sin isn’t wrong. Sin against fellow believers in the church is called out as being especially serious. The Lord's Supper and Baptism are designed for sinners, but only one certain type of sinners: repentant sinners.

According to the Bible, if you believe the that Jesus died and rose again according to the scriptures, and you agree that your sin is wrong and needs to be forgiven and done away with, then sacraments are for you since the gospel applies to you. Better yet is to say that the sacraments are for us since the gospel applies to us who believe in Jesus to forgive us together has His Body.