

04-19-15

Series: The Anatomy of a Church

# The Anatomy of a Church (56)

Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

[Acts 20:28](#)

(Continuation from 04/12/15)

## The Internal Systems-2

### UNITY

#### The Root of True Unity

[John 17:20](#) (NASB)

<sup>20</sup>“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word.”

The apostles and their associates were the human authors of the New Testament ([John 14:26](#); [John 16:13-15](#); cf. [Eph. 2:20](#)), therefore all who would be saved in the future would come to Christ **through their word**. Some would hear that message directly from the apostles' own preaching (e.g., [Acts 2:14-42](#); [Acts 3:11-26](#); [Acts 4:8-12](#); [Acts 5:30-32](#); [Acts 13:14-41](#); [Acts 16:11-14](#); [Acts 17:22-34](#); [Acts 18:4-11](#)). Most, however, would hear the apostolic message through the written Word of their Spirit-inspired writings. The early church was reading the truths of Scripture when reading “**the apostles' teaching**” ([Acts 2:42](#); cf. [Jude 17](#)). Through the centuries all who have preached the true gospel have preached the apostles' word. As Paul wrote in [Romans 10:17](#), “**Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ**” (lit., “a speech about Christ”)—the apostolic message of salvation.

The disciples at that point hardly seemed ready to turn the world upside down (cf. [Acts 17:6](#)). One of them, Judas Iscariot, had turned traitor, and was at that moment preparing to lead those who would arrest Jesus to Gethsemane ([John 18:1-3](#)). Their brash, bold, seemingly fearless leader, Peter, would soon cower before the accusations of a servant girl, and repeatedly deny the Lord ([John 18:17](#); cf. [vv. 25-27](#)). The rest of the disciples would abandon Jesus after His arrest and flee for their lives ([Matt. 26:56](#)).

But Christ's prayer ensures that the apostles' ministry would be successful. In His omniscience, Jesus knew that they would fulfill their role in redemptive history. The gospel would prevail, despite the apostles' weakness, the world's hatred, and Satan's opposition. Empowered by the Holy Spirit ([Acts 1:8](#); [Acts 2:1-4](#)), those early disciples would begin the chain of witnesses that continues unbroken down to the present day (cf. [2 Tim. 2:2](#)). All of the church's evangelistic success is the result of the Lord's request in [John 17:20](#) for those who would believe in the future. This request guaranteed the successful establishment of the church, and the success of its evangelistic ministry from apostolic times to the present. “I

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**will build My church,” Jesus declared, “and the gates of Hades will not overpower it”**  
**[\(Matt. 16:18\)](#).**

The Lord’s first request may be examined under four headings: **1) the root of true unity, 2) the request for true unity, 3) the representation of true unity, and 4) the result of true unity.**