

Unity In The Church

Ephesians 4:1-6

August 25, 2024

Please open your Bibles today to Eph 4. Pew Bible. The doctor told a patient, “You have acute appendicitis.” The patient replied, “Is that better than an ugly one?” I’m told you can hear the blood in the veins in your leg if you listen varicosely. Why do your heart, liver, and lungs all fit in your body? Because they are well **organized**. We’re going to be talking about the body today. Say body.

Two weeks ago we talked about our baptismal vows and welcomed 9 new members into our body. Next Sunday, God willing, we’ll be welcoming some more both by transfer and by baptism. It’s an exciting and wonderful time for our church family as we receive new brothers and sisters, some by birth, others by adoption.

But it’s also a time of greater responsibility. The good part is that we gain more members to help do God’s work. The challenging part is that whenever we get a new brother or sister, we assume the additional obligation of caring for them. Whenever relationships add people, the opportunities for conflict and disagreement increase. One person never gets in an argument, unless you’re me. Two people will from time to time. Three people more so and four, almost always. We’re at 341 active members so I think you can begin to understand the potential for conflict within the family. Let’s look at some Scriptures that might help us with some of these challenges. If you’re able, please stand as we read from Eph 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

As usual, Paul is in jail when he writes this letter. Whenever he got to town, he always checked into either the synagogue or the jail, and often both. He’s a prisoner for Jesus. And sitting in his cell, he’s thinking about the church he planted in Ephesus and what type of instruction they need that he can give them. Part of that is what we just read. Live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Say worthy. As we have said so many times before our works don’t save us and can’t. But if we are saved, our works ought to prove it. Others are to see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. So living a life worthy of our calling as a child of God, means obeying Jesus in every way we know how. Not trying to squeak by with the bare minimum. Not living like the world around us. We sometimes hear the term carnal Christian. I’m not sure there is such a thing. A Christian who lives like the world. That is a contradiction. This is a call to holy living made possible by the Holy Spirit living

within us. Our calling is to be a disciple of Jesus, a child of the eternal Almighty God. Are we living a life that is worthy of our calling? A life that glorifies God? I pray so.

If we're not sure what that looks like, he gives us some direction in vs 2. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Wow. I wish he had left it more vague. Completely humble. No room for selfish pride. No room for personal glory.

Say gentle. Completely gentle. Not overbearing or reckless. The Amplified Bible says meekness, unselfishness, mildness. You say, "I'm rough and gruff by nature. That's just the way I am." That may be but Jesus died to transform us into the way **He** is and wants us to be. In some cases, it's filing down our rough spots, in other cases, we've got to take a chain saw to ourselves. Completely gentle. Some of the most gentle people I've ever known have been the biggest. Steve Good, Donnie Sherman, and others.

Be patient. "But I don't want to be patient." He didn't ask us if we wanted to be patient. It's a command. **Be** patient. Which tells me we can learn it. For all of us for whom patience doesn't come naturally. That's 98% of us. I read about a guy who intentionally gets in the longest line at the store to increase his patience. I did my part. I went to the DMV this week. But I must say, I didn't even get to start into my magazine. But what about with our brothers and sisters in the church? "He or she should be more mature." Yes, perhaps so. But in the meantime, they give us opportunities to stretch this fruit of the spirit. Patience is not a gift that only certain people have, it is a spirit fruit we are all to produce.

And then he adds, bearing with one another in love. Say bear with. That means showing grace. Giving mercy. Mechanics know that a bearing acts like a shock absorber between a shaft and a block. Bearings sometimes wear and have to be replaced. That's OK. The main thing is that the other piece doesn't. As we bear with each other, we absorb some of the friction that builds up between us. Even in the Body of Christ, there can be great friction. Which is why we're all called to be bearings. Say I'm a bearing. To **bear with** one another in love. When others don't measure up to what we think they should be or what they really should be. When they let us down.... Again. Just as we need them to bear with us.

Ephesians is not like the letters of Timothy and Titus which were addressed to church leaders. This letter is to the whole church. To every member of the body. This isn't meant to be superstar Christian behavior. This is the expectation for every believer. But those who are shown grace and mercy shouldn't use that as an excuse to slack off. "Well, they have to show me grace, so I'll just do the minimum." For God's sake no! As we already read, live a life worthy of your calling! Live up to your name of

Christian! Little Christ! Which means to be trustworthy, honest, dependable, kind, devoted, hardworking, hard-praying, etc.

Vs 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Say unity. The church of Jesus Christ is to be unified. All for one and one for all. Sadly, we are sometimes just a collection of individuals that don't mix. We come together, we tolerate each other, we sit beside each other but don't know and don't want to know any more about each other. Remember from science class the difference between a solution and a suspension? In a suspension, the particles don't dissolve. They are just mixed together and will settle out if given a chance. A solution is a total mixing of components. They become inseparable. Ingredients dissolve into each other. That should be the church. Unified. United. A part of each other. It takes time. It takes desire. It takes determination. We have to **decide** to do this and work at it with every effort. Not casually, but intentionally.

The Amplified Bible again helps us understand this where it says, "Be eager and strive earnestly to guard and keep the harmony and oneness of ... the Spirit." Are we eager for unity? Are we striving earnestly to guard and keep the harmony of the Spirit? Harmony is what happens when the choir members sing different parts. They're singing the same words but with different notes. Soprano, alto, tenor and bass notes that complement each other. And it comes out beautifully. One harmony. We can't all sing the same notes. Some voices are higher or lower than others, just as in the body of Christ, we don't all have the same gifts. But we can all work together to complement each other to produce beautiful harmony that glorifies God and points others toward Jesus. We must be eager for this and strive earnestly for it. We must make every effort, the Bible tells us.

It takes time. We must make time with each other and for each other. When we hear of a prayer request to actually pray, and then reach out and follow up and show true concern. This is not just the pastor or deacon's work, it's all of us work. Now here's the challenge. How do you keep up with over 300 siblings? Nobody can. But we need to keep up with some. And that's where Sunday School classes and small groups come in. Choir, AWE, men's group, prayer teams, Bible Studies, women's lunches, etc. That's why it's important to be a part of some group, not just to learn and grow, but to get to know some of our brothers and sisters better. No one can do them all, but to have at least one group to connect with others.

It's OK not to be intimately close to everyone in a church this size. You can't. But we should be close to some. I grew up with only 3 siblings, but even then I was closer to Dale than the others because they were older and I wasn't around them as much. That's why I'm a bit warped. I never loved them less. But being a family of God takes work. It takes determination. It takes effort and it takes time. I fear that when we promise to be a family of faith to our new siblings like we did two weeks ago and will do

again next Sunday, we fail to consider the commitment we're really making. To be there for them when they're hurting. To weep with those who weep. To mourn with those who mourn. To laugh with those who laugh and to rejoice with those who rejoice. We've got to take an interest in each other if we're going to really love them which we are called here to do. To know each other, we have to participate in family events. If a family member doesn't come to family meals or celebrations or join in supporting other family members they're not acting like family.

As brothers and sisters in Christ we are to get up into each other's business. We give each other permission to do that when we join His family. But we must be confidential! If we betray a trust or share a secret, we have violated a very holy and sacred thing. Loose lips not only sink ships, they also sink churches and relationships.

Keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace means we don't hurt each other either on purpose or by neglect. By oversight. Which requires intentional effort rather than just passive participation. If we realize along the way that we have hurt someone even though it wasn't intentional, we apologize and ask forgiveness and grant forgiveness. Where possible we make reparations. The root word is repairs. We repair the relationship instead of defending ourselves and blaming others. Now there must be realistic expectations. No one can be there every single day, all the time. So we give each other grace. We bear with when someone lets us down. But that doesn't give us an excuse to let someone down when we know better and should be there especially if we know they would be there for us. It sometimes involves setting aside our own families for our spiritual brothers and sisters.

We work to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Say bond. A bond is a something that sticks things together. Bernie was telling us at men's lunch about the world's largest popcorn ball they saw in Sac City, Iowa. Orville Reddinbocker would be so happy. Everybody has their claim to fame. Somebody asked what held it together. Dale said marshmallow cream. Peace is the bonding agent in the Body of Christ. The peace and love of Jesus is the glue that holds us together like so many pieces of popcorn. Whenever we start to fracture, we need to apply more of His peace, more of His love to make sure the unity of the Spirit is maintained.

And then Paul gives us the picture of the big popcorn ball in in the next few verses. Say one body. Paul uses the illustration of the body often for the church. Take a body part away and it is incomplete. That's how we should feel when one of us is missing. Like an elbow isn't there, or a big toe, or a liver. Sometimes the church looks like a paraplegic wounded warrior, not from spiritual warfare, but from attrition. People just not showing up. Not participating, not worshipping, not praying, not loving, not growing. Sometimes we've wounded each other and haven't reached out to heal. There is one body whose unity we should protect.

There is also one Spirit. Say one Spirit. There's not many Holy Spirits. Just one. The One. The Holy Spirit is God and He lives inside every true believer. We may resist, quench, or grieve the Holy Spirit but He's there. And He is the mechanism that produces and excretes the love and peace of Christ that sticks us together like marshmallow cream. You've heard of the life force, the Holy Spirit is the New Life force that lives within all believers. One Spirit which works toward keeping the unity within Jesus' Body, the Church.

We have one hope. Say one hope. The Democrats talked about hope this past week. They hope to elect Kamala. Of course the GOP hopes to elect Trump. What are you hoping for today? Some are hoping for a raise, some for a new house or car, some to get married, some to hit the lotto. In Jesus, we have one hope. The certain hope of salvation and eternal life. The certain assurance of sins forgiven and heaven itself. The glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, which Paul calls our Blessed Hope! And blessed it is! This is part of what unifies us in the church! Our unified Hope is not in an election, but in the soon return of our Lord Jesus Christ!

We have one Lord. Say one Lord. Not many lords. Not many masters. Just One. Our Lord Jesus Christ. We sang about Him today, the Church's **one** foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord! The Solid Rock! All other ground is sinking sand!

And we have one faith. We are united in what we believe. I'm so thankful for the CBC Statement of Faith that clearly spells out what we believe. We believe the whole Bible but the statement of faith boils it down. When there are multiple beliefs about how you get saved, about who Jesus is, about heaven or hell, there can be no unity. But in Jesus and in the Bible, we have one faith! One common belief!

And one baptism. Say baptism. We talked about that at length the other Sunday. When everyone who can physically be baptized **is** baptized, not only are we united in belief, but also in practice. In obedience. As we said then, baptism is a common door through which all enter the church. We have one baptism.

And we have one God and Father of all. Say one God. There are many false gods and many idols. There are many things people worship today other than Yahweh. But He is the only one true God. People talk about the universal fatherhood of God. Yes, He is the Father of all by Creation, but not by regeneration for many don't acknowledge Him. And those who don't are not His spiritual children and will not live with Him forever.

He is over all and through all and in all. I'm not in charge and neither are you. God is. He reigns supreme and ever more shall. The Amplified Bible says He is Sovereign over all. As we recognize His Fatherhood and Headship, His Sovereignty, it

fosters unity between us His children. And here we are to worship Him together, the One who is over all and through all and in all!

These seven items we have in common bring unity. They unite us together and make us one as we live lives worthy of our calling being completely humble, gentle and patient and as we bear with each other in love. Making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Let's ask for His help to do that now.