

Sermon on Ephesians 4:1-6 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

Ephesians 4:1-6 “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call- 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” ESV

The church is meant to have and maintain a peculiar unity.

Playing for the name on the front of the jersey. I don't remember when I first heard it but playing high school football, among the more meaningful pregame talks from coach was the exhortation to a bunch of kids that wanted to make a name for themselves, to set that aside and instead to play for the name on the front of the jersey. Sure our individual names were on the back but a more important, lasting name was on the front.

Team unity. A bond that would carry us through the travails of the gridiron!

It was rousing and meaningful and I think right before a loss.. maybe even the game I caused a devastating fumble!

But in an age of individualism, of personal brands, of quick-canceling of those different and disagreeable - there is something deep within us that longs for a part of something bigger than ourselves - to play for the name on the front of the jersey.

For followers of Jesus it's actually what we are called to. A unity of mission, unity of purpose, of worship, and life that reveals something greater than ourselves. The church is meant to be a place of relational beauty.

Among the prevailing winds of our day, the church has the opportunity to make much of the name we claim, to pursue and maintain a peculiar unity in a divided world.

And that accords with our calling.

Context - In our study of Ephesians we have heard the rousing proclamation of truth. And here we have a hinge point in the letter. Chapters 4-6 are the practical outworking of the indicatives, the hope written in chapters 1-3.

“I therefore... urge you...” This is a life worthy of the calling you have received.

The church is meant to have and maintain a peculiar unity.

Two movements this morning in the exposition of the word. How we are unified, and how we stay that way.

1. Followers of Jesus are tethered to each other by the Spirit.

“Tethered” - fastening together, keeping things together or in one place. We often use the word in reference of being tethered, tied to, the historic church, all those that have come before us in following Jesus.

We occasionally watch a show called Expedition Unknown, and on one episode the host Josh Gates and archaeologist, explores a flooded tomb under an ancient pyramid. Where there is no air and no visibility, the team had to be tethered together so no one was lost.

That’s the picture we have here in the unity of the church.

Now Paul has in mind the whole expansiveness of the church, the church global, but also, as this is a letter received by individual churches, the local iterations of the church.

Smaller churches as a picture of the reality of the global church. All unified. Made one.

And in the exhortation toward unity in the body of Christ Paul gives the manner and the means of unity. But the basis, the foundation, beginning of this unity is found in the phrase “unity of the Spirit.”

The apostle is anchoring the church in the truth that came before.

Ephesians 2:19–22 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, [20] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, [21] in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. [22] In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (ESV)

We have talked about how radical this was. Jews and Gentiles made one. Think of any two groups that would be impossible to bring together and you get a sense of how miraculous this is. Republicans/Democrats (too easy!); Hutus/Tutsis; Israelis/Palestinians. Peace between them would give us pause... it would be noticed because it would be profound.

This is what happens in Jesus. Vastly different tribes, zealots/tax collectors, those that common sense says shouldn't be together... are united.

By the Spirit - the third person of the trinity brings together strangers and aliens and makes the church. Birthed or formed from the gospel: that we were dead in our trespasses and sins, but God, because of the great love he has for us, being rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ.

That is the church's basis for unity, and the way unity is established by the Spirit among us. So many had tried to form churches or achieve unity around other motivations or affinities, but these always wreck it.

This is what the word proclaims: we are meant to be unified, and not just a unity that is lightly kept, but a peculiar unity that is unseen elsewhere. A unity defined by peace.

Peace is a state of reconciliation and love and therefore acts as a bond to unite believers in Christ. Believers do not create unity but are to preserve the unity already established.

Unity is not an add-on to Christianity. It is at the very heart of our faith. Unity is already established in Christ by the Spirit. The only One to get the credit.

Where some try to control and force a faux unity, that which is by the Spirit is refreshingly different.

“Live a life worthy, walk in a manner worthy of your calling...”

“It should always be remembered that the word walk, in the language of the Apostle, is of a very extensive signification. It includes all our inward and outward motions; all our thoughts, and words, and actions. It takes in, not only everything we do, but everything we either speak or think. It is, therefore, no small thing “to walk,” in this sense of the word, “worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called;” to think, speak, and act, in every instance in a manner worthy of our Christian calling.” John Wesley, Sermons, on Several Occasions (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1999).

Paul gives the manner of unity - humility, gentleness.

In our thinking, walking, living, we want to be like Jesus and it starts here in unity. Hear the call...

Matthew 11:28–30 “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. [29] Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. [30] For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)

“In the one place in the Bible where the Son of God pulls back the veil and lets us peer way down into the core of who he is, we are not told that he is “austere and demanding in heart.” We are not told that he is “exalted and dignified in heart.” We are not even told that he is “joyful and generous in heart.” Letting Jesus set

the terms, his surprising claim is that he is “gentle and lowly in heart.” Dane Ortlund

“When the Bible speaks of the heart, whether Old Testament or New, it is not speaking of our emotional life only but of the central animating center of all we do. It is what gets us out of bed in the morning and what we daydream about as we drift off to sleep. It is our motivation headquarters. The heart, in biblical terms, is not part of who we are but the center of who we are. Our heart is what defines and directs us.”

And this is Jesus’ heart toward you. Stuck in disregard of God, in sin and the worship of self, clinging to idols of passion and pleasure, far off... and he longs for you. Gentle, humble...

What we are to become by the Spirit. Humbled by being called we live humble. Experiencing the gentleness of Christ, we live gentle with others.

“If you are humble and are aware of your limits and remember how you were saved, you will take this recollection as the motive for every excellent moral behavior. You will not be excessively impressed with either chains or privileges. You will remember that all is of grace and so walk humbly.... “With all lowliness,” he says, not in words only or even in deeds but more [NT Vol. VIII, p. 159] so in the very manner and tone of your voice. And not meek toward one person and rude toward another but humble toward everyone, whether enemy or friend, great or small.” Chrysostom

Our manner of unity is a letting go of self.

Philippians 2:3–8 “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.” (ESV)

Christians do not have separate “hopes” but are together called to eternal life and to enjoy God forever in resurrection glory. They are also called to express that unity this side of eternity.

Our means then of unity are with patience, bearing with one another in love.

Now it must be said, you can't get any of this alone. You don't get this from a solitude retreat where you lock yourself away and read a book on patience. You get this through the practice of community.

Community is essential.

Church is not merely a place to consume religious goods, the Sunday sermon and worship, it is a body that lives and moves, it is pursuing Jesus, our vocations, our dreams, facing our fears, with each other.

And it's hard.

Thinking of football again, I think I have mentioned this, when Coach got on my case for hitting so hard in practice. “Why do you hit harder in practice than you do in games?” I responded that in games I don't know those guys, but in practice I knew these guys and didn't like them!

But dying to self, setting aside me as priority, being patient, bearing with, this is the goods. This is where transformation happens.

“Christ-honoring fellowship is only possible when believers bear with one another in a spirit of love. The word for “bear” in the original Greek means “to endure something unpleasant or difficult.” Bearing with one another implies willingness to endure with other believers, despite differences and frustrations. We are to live in a spirit of humility and treat one another with patience and compassion. Real relationship, especially in a community as diverse as the church, will always require forbearance. But this isn't just putting up with each other or glossing over difficulties while harboring bitterness or allowing sinful behaviors to run rampant. We are to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit

in the bond of peace,” therefore believers are called to forgive one other as the Lord forgives us *and exhort each other to the live he calls us to.*”

Colossians 3:11–15 “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. [12] Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.” (ESV)

It is all worth it because of what we have in Christ.

Setting aside our perceived rights for the other, our preference, our fame for the name on the front of the jersey and the good of the team.

“Here then are the choices we all face moment by moment: Will we aim to be impressive? Will we expect to be in complete control? Will we ensure that we always come out on top as winners? Or will we be happy for the power of Christ to rest upon us in our endless weakness? ‘No man can give at once the impressions that he himself is clever and that Jesus Christ is mighty to save.’ Neither can any church.” – Ray Ortlund, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*

“Beautiful was Paul’s bond; beautiful too is this [bond of peace among Christians], and the former arises from the latter. Bind yourselves to your brethren. Those thus bound together in love bear everything with ease.... If now you want to make the bond double, your brother must also be bound together with you. Thus he wants us to be bound together with one another, not only to be at peace, not only to be friends, but to be all one, a single soul. Beautiful is this bond. With this bond we bind ourselves together both to one another and to God. This is not a chain that bruises. It does not cramp the hands. It leaves them free, gives them ample room and greater courage.”

We are not exhorted to create unity but rather maintain the unity that already exists because of the finished work of Christ by the Spirit.

We get there by prioritizing, staying in the gospel.

2. The church remains unified tethered to the gospel.

“J. Dwight Pentecost tells of a church split that was so serious each side filed a lawsuit to dispossess the others from the church, completely disregarding the Biblical injunction not to go to court against fellow believers. The civil courts threw it out, but eventually it came to a church court, where it belonged. The higher judiciary of the church made its decision and awarded the church property to one of the two factions. The losers withdrew and formed another church in the area. In the course of the proceedings the church courts found that the conflict had begun at a church dinner when an elder received a smaller slice of ham than a child seated next to him.⁸ The root of the impasse was an absence of patience and forbearing love—not to mention humility and gentleness!”

An absence of gospel doctrine creating gospel culture.

Ephesians 4:4–6 “There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (ESV)

“Paul goes on to mention seven theological propositions that speak to the reality of the unity the church in Ephesus already shares: (1) We are one body. (2) We have one Spirit. (3) We have one hope. (4) We have one Lord. (5) We have one faith. (6) We have one baptism. (7) We have one God and Father of all. The unity of the church—which given this doctrinal foundation does not require any sort of watered-down theology—is precious to Christ and should be precious to us (cf. John 17:20–23).”

Unity is a trinitarian work. The Spirit is linked with the one body or church, which is called to one hope. The Lord is linked with the one faith the church professes and the one baptism it receives. Finally, God the Father is the one who

supremely rules over all his creation and yet is intimately involved in it, working in and through all things.” God’s oneness defines the church’s oneness.

This is a recounting of the glorious truth Paul began his letter with. The declaration of the promise of Christ, his finished work, and the church that results. It is the good news of a God whose heart is gently and lowly coming to bring home sinners and savages for his glory and our good.

We maintain unity then when in the gospel we find ourselves made humble, patient and loving - soaked in the truth of Christ, his grace toward us.

“the closer we draw to God, the closer we will be to each other. If we would truly live this principle, not just give a superficial nod to it, there would indeed be unity.”

It’s why we rehearse it week in and out. Hope for now, for eternity, and for unity.

I regularly mention being “tethered to the historic church” and it is a church that is tethered to the gospel. We share the gospel will all that have gone before and all that will come after and it is what maintains unity.

Apostles Creed

“I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.
And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, dead and buried.
On the third day, He rose again from the dead.
He ascended to heaven,
And sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit,
The holy universal church,
The communion of saints,

The forgiveness of sins,
The resurrection of the body,
And the life everlasting.
Amen.”

Our unity is maintain as we clarify, cling to, and live in response to these truths. By no means a watering down of truth but a keeping the centrality to it. Tethered is restraining.

And the implications of the gospel are worked out (gently) in community... we remind each other of a life worthy of our calling. Humbly, patiently, we are on each others' side.

“When the doctrine is clear and the culture is beautiful, that church will be powerful. But there are no shortcuts to getting there. Without the doctrine, the culture will be weak. Without the culture, the doctrine will seem pointless.” Ray Ortlund

No hope of unity with the gospel. Doctrine and culture.

Pauls exhortation to bearing with one another in love in Colossians 3 included being tethered to the gospel.

Colossians 3:16–17 “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (ESV)

A peculiar unity, a noticeable unity of humility, gentleness, patience and love.

“The need of our times is nothing less than the re-Christianization of our churches, according to the gospel alone, in both doctrine and culture, by Christ himself...Churches don't make the gospel true. It is true even when the household of God behaves badly. But people can see that it is true, and doubters are

converted when “the sweetness of the Lord” is upon us (Ps. 90:17, JB).” —
Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.,

The church is meant to have and maintain a peculiar unity.

Go all in - Commit to each other for the glory of Christ and your good. Get up in each others business! Refuse to perform, humbly be real. Bear with one another in love (give yourself opportunities for it).

Cling to the gospel - Crave it, consume it, talk about it, live a life worthy of it.

The kingdom, the church, is not a football team, it's better. We have been made one for the glory of the Lord. We play for the name on front. It's what we are meant for.

May it be so in us.

Romans 15:5–6 “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, [6] that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (ESV)