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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study Series
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Let's Begin

According to the standard dictionary, unity is the state of being one, and therefore implies a fundamental "oneness." Unity in the church as an assembly of baptized believers in Jesus Christ was a theme the Lord Himself addressed most often.

Perhaps the most visible example of Christ's call to unity in the body of Christ is in His moving prayer recorded by the Apostle John, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me" (17:21-23). The Lord Jesus prayed His church would be united as one.

We find the Apostle Paul focusing on unity as well. We are to walk together, fellowship together, and serve together. We are one.

Chapter 4 marks the beginning of the practical considerations Paul gives to the church. Whereas the first three chapters reached deeply into the doctrinal waters, the next three chapters apply the doctrinal truths to our everyday lives, or as the Apostle dubs it, our "walk."

As we begin the second half of Ephesians in our study of chapter 4, let's follow the outline below:

- I. The Ground of our Unity (vv. 1-6)**
- II. The Gifts of our Unity (vv. 7-12)**
- III. The Goals of our Unity (vv. 13-16)**
- IV. The Guarding of our Unity (vv. 17-32)**

I. The Ground of Our Unity (vv. 1-6)

The Apostle opens the chapter laying the foundational planks to establish our unity in the body of Christ. He writes, "I ... beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called... Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. *There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all*" (vv. 1-6). In these verses, Paul reveals a two-fold phase in laying the foundational groundwork for unity in the church.

First, he reveals *spiritual realities*. These cords are what bind the church together. All Christians everywhere unite around these truths. Paul speaks of the church as "one body." Every saved person is a secure member in Christ's body. Please note: Paul is not referring to the local church in this particular instance. Instead he refers to the universal church.

The "one body" is bound together by the "One Spirit." The same Holy Spirit indwells every believer. Hence, all believers possess "one hope." And our "blessed hope," is the return of the Lord Jesus (Titus 2:13). In addition to "one hope," believers possess both "one faith" and "one baptism;" that is, we have a common body of truth upon which all believers stand, and a common baptism all believers experience as we are placed into the body of Christ (cp. 1 Cor. 12:13). Finally, we have "one God" Who remains "our" Father, making us the eternal family of God as we come under the authority of "one Lord," Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church.



Reflection Connection

Think about the oneness of the church. Then consider how oneness is expressed when we have so many different denominations of the Christian church. Perhaps this is a good time to ask the Pastor to lead in a brief discussion on why various denominations exist.

Next, Paul reveals *spiritual graces* as the second phase in laying the groundwork for our unity in Christ. The Apostle instructs us in, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). In keeping the unity for which Paul calls, God bestows upon us, graces to both assist and endure. For example, Paul speaks of “lowliness” and “meekness.” By the former he means simply humility. Humility begins when we place ourselves in right relationship to God by bowing before Christ, receiving Him as Lord and Savior. When we are humble, we are yielding ourselves to the glory of God, accepting God’s estimation of us rather than our own selfish ego demands. And, by the latter, Paul does not mean by meekness what most commonly is meant to be weakness. Instead, he means God-controlled; that is, our tongue, our words, our deeds are all under check by the Holy Spirit.

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In addition, Paul also mentions both “longsuffering” and “forbearance.” When we are “longsuffering,” we are committed to enduring discomfort without retaliation. Or, as Paul puts it in another context, we *endure* suffering (2 Cor. 1:6; cp. also 1 Pet. 2:19). In doing so, we are acting God-like, for He is longsuffering toward us (1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Pet. 3:20). Similarly, God is also “forbearing” toward us. He “puts up” with our waywardness, always eager to forgive and restore as we turn to Him. Why? Because of His great love for us. Is this not Paul’s implication of the believer’s behavior when he or she is exhorted to “forbear” one another “in love”? The Christian’s attitude should be permeated with love for other believers. Unity demands we love one another.

II. The Gifts of Our Unity (vv. 7-12)

While we are called to unity as the church of Jesus Christ, our unity does not destroy our individuality. Unity and diversity existing side by side is one of the marvels of the Christian church.

The Apostle states three basic truths about the gifts of our unity. First, *a person delivers the gifts of our unity* (vv. 7-10). Who is the One Who gives our gifts? The Lord Himself, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth?” (vv. 8-9). The Lord descended to the earth, leaving the glories of heaven behind for the single purpose of doing battle with the evil one (1 John 3:5, 8). Afterward, He went back to heaven to await the time when He comes for His church.

In the meantime, He “gave gifts unto men,” which brings us to the second basic truth about the gifts of our unity: *the people develop the gifts* (v. 11). The gifts are, in this particular context, not gifts to the individual church members. Instead, the gifts are for the church at large, and are four in number:



- ✦ *Apostles*: Foundational office given to only select few who began the church of Jesus Christ. In this sense, no one can be an Apostle today.
- ✦ *Prophets*: Again, this is a foundational gift to the entire church (cp. 2:20; 3:5).
- ✦ *Evangelists*: Sharers of the good news of Jesus Christ. Evangelists have a particular calling in winning people to Jesus Christ. Also, there is a difference in being an evangelist and witnessing to our personal faith. One is anointed by the Holy Spirit as an evangelist, while the latter is fulfilling the obligation to share Christ. While not everyone is an evangelist like Billy Graham, all Christians are called to share their salvation experience with Jesus Christ.
- ✦ *Pastor-teachers* are called to feed the flock of God His Word, and serve them faithfully by lovingly leading them in their faith.

The gifts Christ gives the church are to be honored and respected. However, they are mere men and should never be idolized or followed blindly. The church loves them and supports them truly as gifts from heaven.

III. The Goals of Our Unity (vv. 13-16)

God has a reason for His people to experience unity. In other words, God has specific goals in mind.

The first goal of unity is conformity. Note carefully the Apostle Paul's words, "Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ" (v. 13). Conformity is, in its simplest form, being like Jesus. Since God the Father was pleased with His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, He wants us to be like Him, to live like Him. Furthermore, since the world can no longer see the Lord Jesus because of His ascension, the only way people of the world will see Jesus is through our lives.

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The second goal of unity is stability. Paul goes on to say, "That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (v. 14). There are men and religions which seek allegiance to their deception. Their desire is to pull souls away from the truth found only in Christ. Hence, the Apostle's words exist about being "tossed to and fro." The term "tossed" was used of a ship abandoned on a storm-tossed sea. So are our souls if not anchored in Jesus Christ.

Finally, the third goal of unity is maturity (vv. 15-16). As Christians, we were born again by the Spirit of Christ, brought forth as new babes in Christ (John 3:3; 1 Pet. 2:2). Now, we are to grow up in our faith, maturing in our spiritual lives. Or, in Paul's words, we must "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ" (v. 15).

Reflection Connection

What are some helpful ways to observe diversity in our church while preserving the unity of the fellowship? Be prepared to lead a discussion of this topic with the entire study group.



IV. The Guarding of Our Unity (vv. 17-32)

Though God has gifted us with means to unity, and specifically given us goals for unity, it does not follow that we may be careless about maintaining unity. In fact, according to the Apostle Paul, we must do everything possible to guard the unity of our fellowship in Him.

The question is, how may we best preserve unity in our fellowship? One word sums up this section in Paul's words to the Ephesians—"walk." He writes, "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind" (v. 17). And, to understand the image of "walking" in the faith we have in Christ Jesus, the Apostle Paul uses the idea of a contrast between the old man and the new man.

First, note the corruption of the old man (vv. 17-22). Paul is not speaking of a former life. He does not believe in reincarnation. Instead, Paul is referring to a former way of life. In short, he is speaking of the way we lived prior to coming to Christ. He writes, "Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (vv. 18-19). Affirmed about our old life is the "darkened" understanding. And, the only hope is for the light of the glorious Gospel to penetrate the soul's night (2 Cor. 2:4).

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In addition, there is an innate "blindness of heart." The term translated "blindness" implies a forged hardness, a callousness as if scales prohibited their eyes from seeing. Sometimes sin causes this hardness to increase (Heb. 3:13). Hence, repeated sin can make a person's heart "past feeling" (cp. Heb. 3:7-8). Moreover, Paul speaks of "lasciviousness" which empowers "uncleanness with greediness." The term "lasciviousness" basically means an unhindered lust which produces a shameless frame of mind. This perspective does not care who is hurt or destroyed so long as what it wants it gets. Hence, "greediness" is the driving force of every thought.

Second, there is the creation of the new man (vv. 23-32). Paul writes, "And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (v. 24). What is the "new man"? The "new man" is not a renovation of the "old man." Instead, it is the creation of a "new man." The "new man" is the new nature we have in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). All we are is because of Jesus Christ.

Even so, the new creation of a new nature produces several results. First, the new nature brings a *change of attitude* (v. 23). Paul says, "be renewed in the attitude of your minds." Jesus changes the way we think. To be renewed is to be spiritually transformed (cp. 2 Cor. 4:16; Col. 3:10; Rom. 12:1-2). Also, there is a *change of actions* (vv. 24-32). The new nature seeks to be led by the Spirit rather than "grieving the Spirit." To "grieve" is to bring sorrow. Hence, if we grieve the Holy Spirit we bring to Him sorrow upon sorrow!



What grieves the Holy Spirit? Paul has an entire list:

- ✦ *Lying*: A statement contrary to fact and intentionally communicated to deceive. Answering a wrong answer on a test is stating something contrary to fact, but we do not view a child “lying” when he or she gets an incorrect answer on an arithmetic exam. An intention to deceive is at the heart of lying.
- ✦ *Anger*: All anger is not sin or Jesus would be guilty of sin (Mark 3:5). If one gets angry, one needs to be like Jesus—be angry at sin!
- ✦ *Stealing*: Taking the property of someone else. Christians ought not be thieves.
- ✦ *Corrupt communication*: The term “corrupt” was used of rotten fruit. Our language, therefore, can be rotten. Many attempt to attract the world by cursing and swearing like they do. Paul’s words drop like a bombshell on such nonsense.
- ✦ *Gossip*: Our words should be edifying about others. Attempting to spread notions concerning others—true or false—which are not edifying can only lead to sin.
- ✦ *Bitterness*: To be bitter is to possess forged hostility in one’s heart. Bitterness harbors ill will toward others, which explains the misery of some believers.

On the other hand, Paul makes it clear there are certain things which please the Holy Spirit. First on the list is *kindness*. Paul writes, “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (v. 32). Being kind is being gentle, gracious, and easy to get along with. Someone said it best, “Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can read.”

In addition, the Holy Spirit is pleased when we are *tenderhearted*. This is the direct opposite of being hard-hearted. Christians should have the hide of a rhino and the heart of a baby. Our challenge is to toughen the former while keeping the latter soft.

Finally, the Holy Spirit is pleased when we display forgiveness. To be like Jesus is to forgive. If we hold grudges in our hearts, we are dead wrong. To what extent should we forgive? To the extent that God has forgiven us. Forgiveness guards Christian unity.

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul exhorts Christians to not allow “corrupt communication” to proceed from our mouths (v. 29). The Greek term translated “corrupt” is *sapros* which literally means “bad,” “rotten,” or “putrid.” It is often used of vegetables (Matt. 7:17-18; 12:23; 13:48). Paul is pleading with us to make sure our words are wholesome and edifying.

Wrap Up

In this study, Christian unity has been our theme. God demands unity in the body of Christ, but He does not leave us to ourselves to establish it. He gives the church gifts to establish and promote unity. And, He also exhorts us to guard our unity at all costs. Rather than grieving the Holy Spirit, we live day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit, walking in the ways of the Lord.

