

“The Unity of the Spirit”
Ephesians 4:3-6
(Preached at Trinity, November 9, 2014)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has spent three chapters talking about our God's amazing work of redemption and the amazing unity of the church as Jews and Gentiles have become one body.
Ephesians 2:19-22 NAU - "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit."
2. In **Verse 1** Paul admonishes us to walk worthy of our calling.
Paul's primary emphasis for the remainder of this book will focus on the importance of relationships and of the unity of believers.
In **Verse 2** Paul began to expound on how we should walk worthy of our calling by setting forth several Christian virtues that involve our interaction with others.
3. In **Verses 3-6** Paul continues to stress the amazing unity of the body of Christ. I want us to consider together this wonderful unity.
4. How terrible it is when we hear of churches in conflict. It is a great plague; a terrible epidemic. Pastors are dismissed at an alarming rate today.
 - A. Thabiti Anyabwile reported that in 2011 over 1,300 pastors were terminated by the local church each month, many without cause.
34% of all pastors presently serve congregations that forced their previous pastor to resign.
 - B. 25% of the churches in one survey reported conflict in the previous five years that was serious enough to have a lasting impact on congregational life.
 - Only 2% of church conflict involves doctrinal issues.
 - 98% of church conflict involves interpersonal issues – in other words simply because people cannot get along.
 - About 40% of church members who leave their churches do so because of conflict.
5. Paul's words here are of great importance.
Ephesians 4:3 NAU - "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
6. He is saying that every Christian has a duty to give all diligence to preserve the unity that God has provided us. His point is we *have* unity—we must preserve it.

- I. The first thing we see is this unity is a work of the Holy Spirit
- A. Paul has expressed the importance of walking consistently with our Christian calling.
1. This is our responsibility. It is our duty to walk with "humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love"
 2. **Verse 3** is a continuation of **Verse 2**. This way of walking is not *merely* a human work. It demands the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. Humility and gentleness and patience and tolerance – these things are all evidence of the Holy Spirit in us.
 3. You cannot begin reading the Book of Ephesians with **Chapter 4**. This chapter rests upon the previous three.
 - a. This section is presuming God’s powerful work of redemption. **Verse 1** begins with “Therefore.”
 - b. This transformed life can only come through God’s transforming work upon the human heart. It is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit within us.
 4. In **Chapter 3** Paul shared his prayer for these Ephesian Christians **Ephesians 3:16 NAU** - "that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man"
- B. Only the Holy Spirit can product the sweet unity of Christian fellowship
1. This unity is more than just sharing fellowship meals
 2. It is more than going on picnics together.
 3. This unity has particular purpose. It has particular design
- II. What is the purpose of our unity?
- A. That we might with one voice glorify God together
- Romans 15:5-6 NAU** - "Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, ⁶ so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."
1. Our greatest desire is to glorify God.
It is most glorifying to God when we walk before Him in unity with each other. **Psalms 133:1-3 NAU** - "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity! ² It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, *Even* Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes. ³ It is like the dew of Hermon Coming down upon the mountains of Zion; For there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever."
 2. Worship before God is a glorious act of unity and fellowship
Psalms 34:3 NAU - "O magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together."
 3. Strife is like throwing water upon the unity of praise. When every church member is mostly concerned about self God is robbed of His praise.
James 4:6 NAS - "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

- B. A second purpose of our unity is that we might display the excellence of peace and harmony
1. Among men upon the earth there is universal disunity and strife
God created man to enjoy union. He said it wasn't good for man to be alone and then created woman as his helper. Marriage is a wonderful display of unity.
Genesis 2:24 NAU - "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."
 2. But sin affected this sweet unity of oneness. Adam immediately turned against the woman God ordained him to protect
Genesis 3:12 NAU - "The man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate."
 3. Their children were at enmity with one another. Cain killed his brother.
 4. The history of human beings has been a history of disunity.
Today we live a world of warfare, murders, divorce. Siblings turn against one another. Friends betray one another.
Paul described it in **Romans 3**
Romans 3:13-17 NAS - "The poison of asps is under their lips"; "Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness"; "Their feet are swift to shed blood, Destruction and misery are in their paths, And the path of peace have they not known."
 5. The church should be a wonderful display of peace. In Christ walls of division have been broken
Ephesians 2:14 NAU - " For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall"
 6. By God's Spirit our behavior should rise above all human behavior
Ephesians 4:2 NAU - "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,"
- C. A third purpose of our unity is to maintain our spiritual life
1. If we were separated from Christ we would die spiritually
John 15:5-6 NAU - "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. ⁶ "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned."
 2. The same is true of our life together in the church
 - a. We need one another
 - b. We are described using the human body as a metaphor. Each part of our body helps and strengthens the rest.

- c. The early church is described in terms of their togetherness
Acts 2:42-47 NAU - " They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. ⁴³ Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they *began* selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."
3. As the church we are to watch over one another, encourage, and strengthen one another
1 Thessalonians 5:11 NAU – "Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing."
Ephesians 4:29 NAU - " Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a *word* as is good for edification according to the need of *the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear."
Hebrews 10:24-25 NAU - " and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near."
4. We'll see that the purpose of pastors is to equip the members so that they might give themselves to the matter of building up one another.
NAS **Ephesians 4:12-16** – "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love."
- D. A fourth purpose of unity is that we might do the work of the Kingdom together
1. Unity is far more than simply the absence of strife. It is wonderful when the church enjoys seasons free of conflict. But we can get along externally and not really be united. True unity creates an atmosphere of shared labor and unity of purpose.
 2. Kingdom work is a shared work. We are God's laborers.
1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NAU - " I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

3. True unity is more than just the absence of strife. True unity is the active participation of each part. Your hand is not united with your body if it is merely in the same room.
 - a. If you are not actively participating in the life and work of the church you are not truly united with it.
 - b. Too many Christians today approach the church as consumers. They attend as long as it suits their schedule. They enter, listen to the sermon or Bible study and then depart.
 - c. God has equipped every Christian to serve a particular function within the local church.

Conclusion:

1. This unity is the powerful work of the Holy Spirit. But it is made possible through Christ and our union with Him. We are one body united together in an inseparable bond.
2. **Verses 4-6** describe the unique nature of this bond. We'll examine this more carefully over the next few weeks.
3. We must never take our union for granted. It is a wonderful and supernatural work of God. But it is also something we must contend for.
Paul speaks here is maintaining diligence.
Ephesians 4:3 NAU - "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."
4. We must be careful not to break the unity that has been created by the Holy Spirit. It is true that where the Holy Spirit reigns there will be unity.
 - a. Paul tells us in **Chapter 5:18** - "be filled with the Spirit"
 - b. He admonishes us in **Chapter 4:31** - "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice."
5. We are always in danger of conflict and division. Satan is always looking for ways to divide us. Paul reminds us in **Chapter 6** that our striving is not ultimately with flesh and blood.
6. When we are divided we cease to function together as one. The testimony of strife among churches today is appalling.
7. When we dwell together in unity we shine forth the beauty of Christ in us. Our unity is one of the greatest displays of our love.
Colossians 3:12-14 NAU - "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity."
8. Such unity is worth contending for.
May we heed Paul's words carefully:
"being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."