

Unity

Ephesians 4:1-6

Opening: What is your favorite college football team? The Gators? The Seminoles? The Hurricanes? The Bulldogs? The Wildcats? Some of you don't like football at all. NFL only? No NFL?. It's difficult with this many people to agree it on who's their favorite team. **Here's another question: How many of you struggle getting your family to agree on where to go eat?** It's hard sometimes to get my family of 5 to agree and come together on where they want to go. Some person wants to get the food to go, the other person wants a nice, sit-down meal, another wants to eat healthy, and another wants to chicken nuggets and French fries. As hard as it is to get people to agree on the same football team or a family to agree on where to eat, it is even harder for the church where there are people from different backgrounds, preferences, cultures, and opinions to agree. If you have a church of thousands, you get thousands of opinions. It is impossible to make everyone happy and to suit everyone's preferences. But despite all of our differences, the church is the ONE place where we can have unity because our unity is in Jesus. *My hope is that our church with people from different backgrounds, preferences, ethnicities, and giftedness will all unite around the gospel of Jesus Christ and the vision of being a multi-generational, multi-ethnic, multiplying church that reaches Naples to the Nations. The goal of our church is not to GROW but to MULTIPLY!*

Context: The book of Ephesians was written by Paul to a church where he spent over two years. Ephesus was a wealthy, metropolitan city filled with socio-economic and ethnic diversity (racial tension). Paul is writing to strengthen their faith so that the "eyes of their hearts may be enlightened" and that they would "be filled with the fullness of God." So that the church would be unified in the gospel in reaching their city and the nations for Jesus Christ. A unified church will shake the gates of hell. There is nothing that Satan fears more than a church that is unified in Jesus Christ. This is why Satan will do everything he can to divide the church. A unified church can change the world. In a divided world, we need a united church. **In Chapter 4, Paul teaches us both the cause and the cost of our unity in Christ.**

I. The Cause of our Unity

- **VS. 1: I therefore:** Paul is shifting gears and is connecting everything he just taught in Ch. 1-3 to what he is about to say in Ch. 4-6. Chapters 1-3 serve as the theological grounding for the practical, everyday living of a Christian. There are 41 commands in Ephesians and 40 are found in Chapters 4-6.
- **Paul began his letter by giving the why behind the what:** Why we live this way rather than just what we are supposed to do or not do. If you don't give connect the why behind the what in Christianity, you will produce hypocrites not Christians. Parents who just tell their kids just what to do or not to do without explain why, may modify their kid's behavior but will not change or guide their hearts. (Cell Phones)
- **Urge you to walk in a manner:** Paul's favorite way to describe living the ordinary Christian life is to "walk." (8x in Ephesians; 33x in all his letters) He is calling believers in light of their calling to live their lives a certain way. He is saying (DMC Run), "Walk this way. Talk this way." This is not a suggestion but a command.
- **A manner worthy of the calling:** What is the calling? It is God's gracious calling in your life that saved you. It is priceless and of infinite worth. **4:4:** It is our hope. **2:1-5:** We were called out of death and into eternal life; out of darkness and into His marvelous light. We were walking with the devil, but we are walking in the good works of God.
- **None of us are worthy of this calling but we are called to live in a manner worthy of it:** we need to sync up with the call. We need to live up to the brand, the name on our jersey. (Kentucky Basketball) This is a proper response to our calling. You are a Christian and you need to act like it and live like it. You are representing our Father and King.
- **How do you do that? Paul lists four virtues:** **With all humility:** lowliness: not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less. Humility is fitting for those who have been called by God. It is honestly accessing ourselves in light of God's holiness and our sinfulness. **Gentleness** is not weakness, but strength under control. **Patience** is suffering long and not blowing up. **Forbearance:** bearing with one another in love is suffering wrong and not breaking up.
- **The goal: Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace:** the point is that Paul wants the church to have unity in the midst of their diversity. (Jew and Gentile) **When a church is on mission (like Ephesus), there are always going to be issues of unity:** when you start reaching people that do not vote like you, dress like you, look like you, talk like you, think like you, have the same amount of money or career path as you, it gets messy.

- **What is Unity?**¹ **Unity is not Uniformity:** it is not where everyone in the church agrees on everything. Oneness is not sameness. It's ok that we don't all think and agree on everything. *A Biblical vision of a New Testament church is a place where Jesus is so large that it should make disagreements on secondary issues seem less important.*
- **Example:** It's amazing how many believers have been willing to walk away from the church over relatively small disagreements. Things that are microscopic compared to the gospel and eternity. Yet, they will abandon their church and go find another one that "fits them." It is amazing to see people who say they hate cancel culture cancel their church over disagreements they have only temporary things.
- **Michael Bird:**² three levels of importance for issues in the church: **1)** Matters essential for salvation (Gospel, person of Jesus, the way of salvation. **2)** Matters that are important to the faith and the church, though not essential for salvation. (sexual ethics, gender) (Both 1&2 are clear in scripture) **3)** Matters of indifference: non-essentials, debatable things, preferences, and opinions. (Politics, spiritual gifts) (the Greek word for opinion is Twitter.)
- **Not every issue is 1st order issue:** one pastor said, *"The problem is that the longer you're in a church the more you start to like your opinions on everything and think everyone else needs to live by your opinions."* But that's not true.
- **Unity is not Relativism:** It is not where you just say that everyone is right about everything and that they have "their truth" and you have "your truth." *Everyone is right to each his or her own. Our unity doesn't come at the expense of truth but because of the very existence of the truth.* It is unity in the truth, not in spite of the truth.
- **Example:** Met with a person who was not a Christian and we were talking about sexuality. I asked them, "Do you believe in absolute truth." They said that "truth is on a spectrum. You have your truth and I have my truth" I said, "Is the answer to 2+2 on a spectrum? Do you want a doctor or a pilot to do their jobs on the basis of a truth spectrum?" They said, "You don't understand. We need to love people and let them live their truth." I told them, "But what happens when my truth contradicts, your truth?" They said, "You don't get it." I said, "That's my truth."
- **There are certain truths we cannot compromise on and still have unity.** If you don't have truth, then what is the basis of your unity? **Paul said there are fixed realities: VS. 4-6: 7x1:** one Body (his church), one Spirit (Holy Spirit), one Hope (from our calling), one Lord (Christ), one faith (the Gospel), one Baptism (identifying with Christ), one God and Father over all. *Our unity rests in the oneness of that we have in these fixed realities.* (Oneness of Trinity)
- **We must be unapologetic and never back down from speaking the truth even if people get upset and leave the church over it, but we must always speak the truth in love (4:15).** The most loving thing you can do is graciously speak the truth to someone, even if it hurts. The truth in love often hurts before it heals. (Andrew's Surgery)
- **Unity is not Repression:** it is not where we suppress and repress our thoughts and feelings, never talking about our disagreements and just smile to everyone and say, "Bless their hearts." That is being fake. That is being hypocritical. Real unity is when you actually talking about your differences, and you learn from each other.
- **It is Unity that the Holy Spirit Creates through our Calling:** The Holy Spirit creates the unity and when we lose unity between each other, it's because we have forgotten our calling and are not walking in the Holy Spirit. The Fruit of the Holy Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.*
- **JD Greear:** *True unity in the church is where real people, from different perspectives and preferences, find a larger, uniting hope in Jesus Christ. Unity is having the same convictions about the gospel and the same understanding about its importance and then attempting to think about everything else in line with that.*
- **Our job is to maintain the unity we already have in the Holy Spirit by walking in the Spirit.** That's what it means to walk worthy of our calling. **A mark of the Spirit filled believer is that they are EAGER to want to have unity, not disunity.** If you relish controversy and love to stir up stuff, you are NOT maintaining the unity of the body.
- **Unity of your Hand:** you didn't have to put your hand together; you don't have to create the unity of your hand; it just grew together. Your parents didn't teach you say to you growing up: "It's important that you put your hand together every day." It's naturally put together. But it is VERY IMPORTANT that you maintain the unity of your hand; don't let it get broken or cut off. So, you need to be careful and not careless with you hand. (Broke thumb)
- **The Holy Spirit empowers us to maintain it:** the Holy Spirit preserves the unity through us: If you are struggling to love someone that is different than you or that is difficult to love, you can ask the Holy Spirit to help you. You may pray, "Lord, I do not like this person. But I know that you love them. So will you love this person through me?"
- **Shebu John:** *Our calling as Jesus' disciples is to be a witness through our unity in Him, to world that seems to be even more divided than ever before. Sadly, instead of displaying great unity, we are carried by our culture, rather than being counter cultural. If we belong to Jesus, we have a higher expectation and calling, not to agree on*

¹ Some Ideas from this section of "What is Unity?" I got from J.D Greear: <https://jdgreear.com/what-church-unity-is-and-isnt/>

² Michael Bird. *Romans Commentary*. Page. 478.

everything, but to show in our words and our lives that our disagreements are trivial compared to that which unites us.³

II. The Cost for our Unity

- **VS. 1b: A prisoner for the Lord:** Paul was literally writing this letter from a Roman jail around 60-62AD. He would be under house arrest for two years and then he went into Mamertine prison where from there he would be executed. Why does he remind them of his imprisonment as he is calling them unity in the Spirit? He could have just said, "As an Apostle, I command you to do this." Why does he use the fact that he's a prisoner? **Two reasons:**
- **If you walk this way, it will cost you, like it has cost me:** living for and following Jesus always comes at a personal cost. There is often a dying to self that is involved. **Mark 8:34** And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."
- **A. W. Tozer:** To carry a cross means you are walking away, and you are never coming back. The cross symbolizes what it means to die to self⁴. (The Christian life is not a life void of suffering or sacrifice.)
- **When it comes to unity in the church, it involved a dying to self:** it may cost you, your preferences, convenience, time, energy, and comfort. Being a part of a church is not about all your needs being met at a cost that is acceptable to you and your family. There is a cost involved in being a part of it, but it's worth it.
- **How many of you love your family?** To maintain unity in your family requires a lot of humility, gentleness, patience and bearing with one another. Your kids will often inconvenience you. Your spouse may disappoint you or disagree with you. It cost money, time, effort, and pain. But your family is worth sacrifice.
- **There have been quite a few changes over the past few years in our church.** We are about to go through a massive change starting next week with our new schedule. All of these changes have been thought through and prayed through. All of them have a cost and all of them have some degree of pain (change is always painful). But all of them help us achieve the goal of reaching Naples and the Nations. Unity does not come for free but comes with a cost.
- **We need YOUR help:** our church is growing, and our volunteer numbers are not: God has gifted everyone who is a believer to serve inside the church and reach others outside of the church. There is a TON of opportunities.
- **The Call to live this way is worth being a prisoner for:** my sacrifice for Jesus pales in comparison to Jesus's sacrifice for me. Jesus purchased our unity with His blood on the Cross. Jesus loved us enough to get involved.
- **Ephesians 2:13-14** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility
- **Jesus died so that we could be ONE:** the cost for our unity in bringing together people from all ethnicities, cultures, socio-economic backgrounds was infinite. For us to be together, as sinful as we, Jesus had to die. **But Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to die for us to make us one.**
- **When a community of people understand the magnitude of God's love for them despite how wicked and sinful they are, then they can become a community that grows in the grace of God and speak the truth to each other in love and work together through their differences because they are on the same team for the same goal. That community of believers will change the world for Jesus Christ.**
- **Said's story in Northern Iraq:** Said is a believer who grew up a devout Sunni Muslim from a devout family. Yet, when he left the country for work, he had a dream from Jesus telling him that "He was the truth." He had someone in the country share Jesus with him and he gave his life to Jesus. He understood he could never go home. He could not see his family again, for fear of death. He lost everything. **I asked him, "It is worth it?" He said, "Yes! Jesus is worth it!"**
- **The only way that you and I will go all the way together is KNOWING that Jesus is worth it:** He is worth the pain, the suffering, the inconveniences, the laying down of our preferences and our lives. People in other countries are willing to pay the cost for Jesus and we say Amen to that. But how hypocritical it is for us to say amen to them but not do everything we can to try to reach more people like them. How can we do that? **Together on Team JESUS!**

Application: Football season is about to start. The NFL preseason starts this week (August 4th). Every major sport has an All Star game and the NFL's Pro-Bowl is probably one of the worst sporting events in all of sports. It's so bad they moved

³ [A Better Urge - The Gospel Coalition | Australia](#)

⁴ AW Tozer. The Crucified Life. Pg. 7.

it to Orlando (Camping World Stadium) and still no one attends. If you google, "Is the Pro-Bowl a waste of time?" Google will say, "Between its lack of meaning and effort by the players, the Pro Bowl is increasingly becoming a waste of time."

You have all these very talented guys from different teams playing but the games are horrible. You have the AFC vs. the NFC playing each other. The AFC players have the AFC White jersey on and the NFC with their Blue jersey on, but each player has the team that pays them helmets on. Everyone has their jersey on but the reason the games are not good is because they don't play with passion or as hard as they should. **Why?** Because it's all about the individuals and not about the team. They don't really care about winning. They show up with same jersey, but their helmet tells everyone that this is who I really play for and I'm not really interested in play with these other guys.

Sadly, this happens in the church: we all show up with the First Naples jersey on but a lot of us have a different helmet on. We are for something else, some other program, some other agenda, and some other priority. It's all about me and not us. But We will never reach Naples to the Nation if we are showing up with a jersey that says we are all the same but with different helmets that say, "My real priority is somewhere else."