

Series: *In Christ - ONE*

Title: *"Getting the World to Trust Us Again"*

Text: Ephesians 4:1-16

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I don't know if you remember but back in 1998, author Anne Rice shocked readers and the publishing world when she announced she would never write another vampire book again. Rice is the author of the bestselling *"Vampire Chronicles"* series including *Interview with a Vampire* which was made into a film starring Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise. Many people credit Rice with starting the vampire/zombie obsession that is so prevalent in the entertainment industry these days.

With all that in mind---it was understandable when people were obviously shocked to hear Rice say that she would never write those kinds of books again. When asked to explain her decision she referred to her conversion and said, *"My life is committed to Christ the Lord. My books will be a reflection of that commitment."*

Her fans pushed back begging her to keep writing about vampires, witches, and ghosts. Rice replied, *"Is Christ our Lord not the ultimate supernatural hero, the ultimate outsider, the ultimate immortal of them all?"* Instead, she went on to write two novelizations of the life of Jesus based on the Gospel of Luke. I've never read them---so I don't know how good they are.

Then, twelve years later, in 2010 Rice made another surprising announcement. She wrote on her *Facebook* page: *"Today I quit being a Christian. I'm out. I remain committed to Christ as always but not to being 'Christian' or to being any part of Christianity. In the name of Christ, I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control. I refuse to be anti-Democrat. I refuse to be anti-science. I refuse to be anti-life. In the name of Christ, I quit Christianity and being Christian. Amen."*

She went on to list several other "anti's" that she refused to embrace. But understand, she still claimed to follow Jesus---but wanted nothing to do with the organized church. Rice died last year.

I share her story because sadly it is very similar to what more and more people are doing these days. People are drawn to Christ---they want to follow Him as Lord---but the church---institutional Christianity? Not so much. Like Rice they perceive the church as an *"anti-this or that place."* They feel it is too affiliated with politics, and presidents, etc. All this has led to a sad trend of more and more Christians dropping out of the church and it isn't just young single adults---it's older folks too.

Before we go any further let's take a moment to define "THE CHURCH."

I can think of at least four ways we use this word.

- First, we use it when referring to a building used for Christian worship.  
People say, *"Redland Baptist Church is located at 6922 Muncaster Mill Road."*
- We also use it to describe Christian worship:  
*"Are you going to worship at the 8:30 or the 11:00AM church service this week?"*
- Third, we use the word church when talking about an institution with officers, employees, programs, and resources pursuing Christian goals.  
We say things like, *"I tithe my income to Redland Baptist Church. I give a portion of my money to support this institution and all they do."*
- Finally, we use the word "church" to describe a community of women, men, and children who belong to Christ and live under his reign---as in,  
*"Jennifer Saunders is part of my church." Or "Stephen Ahn is a part of my church." Or "Fred Robinson is a part of my church."*

Okay, when the New Testament speaks about the church, which of these definitions does it refer to? Anyone want to guess?

Right---it always uses the FOURTH.

The problem is, most of us know the church is not a building or an event or an institution we fund. We know the church is a body of believers---a community of Christians.

But more and more people these days DON'T understand this. They think of the church as an INSTITUTION---one that is often more involved with politics and the culture wars than in living out the gospel. This is one reason so many people are turned off by the church---so turned off they are leaving it.

And lest you be skeptical---this trend is confirmed by research. In the 1970's, Gallop found that 68 percent of Americans said they had strong or high confidence in the institutional church. In fact, back then, churches outranked all other institutions as the most respected institutions in America. Today, it's down to 44 percent, and among younger Americans it's even lower. Commitment to an institutional church simply isn't important to the majority of Americans these days.

If it makes you feel any better, it isn't just the institutional church that Americans are losing confidence in. More and more people are turning away from institutions of all kinds.

Sky Jethani shares: *"My generation (Gen X), and Millennials (those born after 1980), have a strong distrust for institutions—and the bigger the institution, the more distrustful we are of it. That's a fascinating shift from earlier generations. For example, Baby Boomers were attracted to big churches. They're the generation that invented by mega-church. For Boomers big meant legitimate. If that church is big it must be doing something right. Things have changed. We're now living in the post-Watergate, post-Enron, post-Lehman Brothers, post-NSA world. Especially for younger people big doesn't mean legit, big means corrupt."*

In 2012 *The Atlantic* magazine ran an article on this trend entitled: *"How Americans Lost Trust in Our Greatest Institutions."* Here's an excerpt:

*"It's not just Washington. Across the country citizens' faith in their city halls, newspapers, and churches is fading. As a generation, the stats show, we just aren't willing to commit ourselves to institutions anymore. Laura Hansen, a sociologist, put it this way: 'We lost [faith] in the media: Remember Walter Cronkite? We lost it in our culture: You can't point to a movie star who might inspire us, because we know too much about them. We lost it in politics, because we know too much about politicians' lives. We've lost it— that basic sense of trust and confidence—in everything."*

Quoting Jethani again, *"More and more people---Christians---are happy to get their Bible teaching from Tim Keller's podcast---and they'll serve with that World Relief or an International Justice Mission program in the city, and they'll study that Francis Chan book with some friends on Wednesday nights. But commit to one local church? No thanks! And give their time, money, and energy to it? Not likely."*

The question I'd like us to deal with this morning---is *"How can we---as a community of believers---how can we get the world to trust us again?" "How can we---the local church---be WORTHY of their trust?"*

For answers to this question let's look at today's text: Ephesians 4:1-16. Take your Bibles or apps and turn there---and if possible, stand in respect for God's Word as it is read:

Ephesians 4:1-16

**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.*  
 7 - *But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.*  
 8 - *This is why it says: "When He ascended on high, He took many captives and gave gifts to His people."*  
 9 - *(What does "He ascended" mean except that He also descended to the lower, earthly regions?*  
 10 - *He Who descended is the very One Who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)*  
 11 - *So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers,*  
 12 - *to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up*  
 13 - *until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*  
 14 - *Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.*  
 15 - *Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him Who is the head, that is, Christ.*  
 16 - *From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

Okay, what qualities does Paul address in this part of his Ephesian letter that will help us reclaim the trust of people who have been turned off by the institutional---organized church?

How does He say we can be WORTHY of our calling as the Church---the body of Christ. First, he cites:

#### 1.) **HUMILITY and GENTLENESS**

Look at verses 1 and 2 where Paul writes: ***"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle."***

This is important for us to hear because the sad fact is there are too many ways that the institutional church has been the opposite of humble or gentle. Too many believers have become proudly MILITANT---unloving---even hateful---toward others who don't share their faith. And of course, that kind of attitude breeds distrust. It pushes people away from the church. This is why years ago Wheaton College in Chicago changed the name of their "mascot" from *"The Crusaders"* to *"Thunder."*

My prayer today is that---as Christians---as a community of believers---we will understand how important it is that we embrace this Biblical principle. We must show a watching world that we are humble and gentle---like Jesus---Who described Himself in this way: ***"I am gentle and humble in heart."*** (Matthew 11:29)

A church community won't draw un-churched Christians---much less people who don't know Jesus---if they spend their time proudly defending their political views---fighting about the latest chapter of the culture wars---proudly spending more time talking about things they are against---than the Gospel. No---we must be humble---and gentle with one another. We must be like Jesus. We must realize that we have no right to be proud---for we are sinners just like everyone else---saved only by the grace of our humble and gentle and all-loving Lord.

I mentioned a 2012 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine---let's go farther back---MUCH farther back---for a magazine article that might help us understand this principle. On May 13, 1965, *Housekeeping Monthly* offered the following advice to women in what they called *"The Good Wife's Guide:"* Here's an excerpt of the guidance they gave to wives in the mid '60's:

*"Plan ahead, even the night before, to have a delicious dinner ready when your husband gets home from work. This is a way of letting him know you have been thinking about him and are concerned with his needs. Prepare yourself. Put on some make-up, put a ribbon in your hair, and be fresh-looking. He's been with a lot of work-weary people. Prepare the children. Take a few minutes to wash them up, brush their hair, and change their clothes if needed. Remember, they are*

*little treasures, and he would like to see them playing the part. Have a cool or warm drink ready for him and arrange the pillow on his easy chair and take off his shoes as he sits down.*

*Over the cooler months you should prepare and light a fire for him to unwind by. After all, catering to his comfort will bring you immense satisfaction. Let him talk first. Remember that his topics of conversation are more important than yours. Never complain if he comes home late or goes out to dinner or entertainment without notifying you. Instead try to understand his world of strain and pressure and his need to relax."*

Isn't that a great article!? Now---I'm no empath---but I think I sense two responses building from you guys---some men are wanting to say, "AMEN! Bring back the good ole days!" Some women are wanting to say, "FIRE THE PASTOR!"

Before you do either---hear me out.

Of course, things have definitely changed---for the good---since the 60's when it comes to husbands and wives. We no longer have June Cleaver welcoming her husband Ward home from work while wearing a dress, high-heels, and a pearl necklace as she gives him the paper, a cup of coffee on a saucer---and guides him to his easy chair while she finishes dinner.

The reason I shared this old article is because believe it or not there is some wisdom here. It's just buried under layers of unbiblical stereotypes and patriarchy. You see, there really is something good and noble about doing these simple, everyday tasks for another person. It's just that, as God teaches us in His Word---it was never meant to flow just one way---from wife to husband, or from woman to man.

No, in the New Testament, Paul tells us everyone in God's church to serve one another, to defer to one another, to humble ourselves to one another to be gentle to one another. This ancient article is about humility---a wife to her husband---and humility is a wonderful thing---when practiced by ALL of us. More importantly it's an attractive thing---to people---even Christians---in this proud, ego-driven, self-centered world. They move from DISTRUSTING a church community to begin DRAWN to a church community that is humble and gentle toward one another.

Pastor Ray Ortlund writes, *"The kind of God we really believe in is revealed in how we treat one another. The lovely gospel of Jesus positions us to treat one another like royalty, and every non-gospel positions us to treat one another like dirt. But we will follow through horizontally on whatever we believe vertically."*

He goes on to identify the "One Another's" he could not find in the N.T.: *"Sanctify one another, humble one another, scrutinize one another, pressure one another, embarrass one another, corner one another, interrupt one another, defeat one another, sacrifice one another, shame one another, judge one another, run one another's lives, confess one another's sins, intensify one another's sufferings, point out one another's failings..."*

Here's a second quality Paul cites:

## **2.) PATIENCE**

In the last part of verse 2 Paul says, ***"be patient, bearing with one another in love."***

We all know this is a hard one. It can be very difficult to be PATIENT and LOVING toward some people---especially balding pastors. But that is how we are supposed to be with one another---patient, long-suffering---loving---CHRISTLIKE.

Now, I know---I freely admit---that I talk too much about my grandkids---but as I thought of how to illustrate patience---I felt led to talk about Luke---Grandchild #5. Specifically, God reminded me of the times when Andrew and Becca and our grandson Luke spend the night in our home. You see, little 16-month-old Luke doesn't do good in strange beds. He prefers his own crib---so bedtime in our pack-n-play is always a challenge.

Luke will stand up and scream and cry pitifully---for a long time. I mean, Andrew and Becca try to wait him out---to teach him to self-sooth himself into dreamland, but it almost never works.

So, they call on me---SUPER-GRANDDAD---AKA the “*Grandbaby whisperer*” and I “humbly” go into action.

You see, my experience with my five other grands has reminded me that getting babies to sleep doesn’t require superpowers---just patience. So, I go into Luke’s room, and I speak calmly to him. I tell him everything is okay. I pick him up and give him a hug. Then, I lay him down in the Pack’-n-play and begin to gently stroke his back---as I sing him a lullaby I learned from my dad---based on the tune to “*Down in the valley.*” Sometimes I make up my own words to the tune: “*We love you Lukee---oh yes we do. We love you Lukee through and through...*” And---no matter how long Luke squirms and screams---I just keep stroking his back and singing that same song over and over and over again. Eventually he calms down---so I stop stroking---and just sing.

I lay down on the bed next to his pack-n-play and continue to hum the tune. Sometimes when I stop his eyes pop open---so I hum some more---and eventually---sometimes 45 minutes later---his eyes close and his breathing becomes slow and steady as he falls to sleep.

In this fractured world it is SO easy for people to be like Baby Luke and YELL and SCREAM at each other. Too many Christians have become TOO good at that. Too often we use social media to lash back at a fellow Christian---instead of being patient and loving.

Remember, we Christ-FOLLOWERS---Christ-IMITATORS---and Jesus was patient. Referring to Jesus’ crucifixion 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 2:23 says: “***When they hurled their insults at Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats.***” In 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:16 Paul says, “***I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display His immense patience---as an example for those who would believe in Him and receive eternal life.***”

Jesus---God-become-flesh---was and still is LONG SUFFERING. He’s patient. And He calls us to be like Him in this. The more patient we are---the more worthy we will be of our calling to be the church. Paul also mentions something we’ve talked about a lot in this study. And I’m referring to:

### 3.) UNITY

Look at verses 3-5 “***Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism---one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all.***”

Please note---Paul doesn’t say, “*Make SOME effort to keep the unity of the Spirit.*” What word does he use? RIGHT---“***EVERY***” --- which infers this UNITY deal is something we must work at ALL THE TIME.

Paul goes on to remind us WHY we must do this. He says: “***There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism---one God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all.***”

We are Jesus’ BODY---the flesh He is using to do His will in this world.

- We share the same HOPE.
- We serve the same LORD Who, as Paul puts it in verse 9, “***...descended to the lower, earthly regions***” to live a sinless life and then die on the cross to save us from our sins.
- We embrace the same FAITH in Jesus.
- We have experienced the same BAPTISM of His Spirit.
- We worship the same GOD and have the same Heavenly Father.

So we have no excuse---we MUST MAKE EVERY EFFORT to preserve our unity. As Mark Buchanan says, “*God is in the uniting business. His passion is reconciliation. Christ’s redemptive work is wall-destroying. The burning heart of God is peace. So, we must make every effort to keep the gift of unity that Jesus gave His life to win for us. A failure of unity among God’s people is a refusal to be a part of the mission that God is doing in the world.*”

Understand, there will be times when we disagree. We are different in so many ways. But we have solid common ground. And this common ground—one God, one faith, baptism, one hope—is vastly wider than our differences. When our *“suspicious of institutions world”* looks at the church, the portrait of Jesus that they should see the clearest is one of the Savior Who reconciles---the Savior Who makes enemies into friends on both a horizontal and vertical plane, the Savior Who reconciles people to God and people to people. Jesus’ death is a reconciling death. He is a unifier.

This week I came across an interesting story about unity. It was shown on ABC News back in 2013. Referring to these three animals, the news anchor shared: *“As cubs, three of the world’s top predators—a lion (Leo), a Bengal tiger (Shere Kahn), and an American black bear (Baloo)---had been owned by a drug dealer who didn’t take proper care of them. The bear’s harness grew into his skin because the owner didn’t alter it as the animal grew. The animals had been abused and neglected early in life but were finally rescued in 2001. The bear’s harness was surgically removed, and all three have recovered 100 percent. They were taken in by Noah’s Ark Animal Sanctuary in Georgia. The staff initially tried to separate them, thinking the three large predators would fight, but they acted out all the more. During separation, the animals were uncooperative. But once they were reunited, they calmed down and behaved well. Twelve years later, the three friends spend their days together playing ball, cuddling, chasing each other, and eating cookies. Allison Hedgecoth of Noah’s Ark said, ‘They live together, and they don’t see their differences.’”*

The unity these three predators enjoy---is an attractive one. I mean, isn’t that a *“feel good story?!”* Wouldn’t you like to drive down to Georgia and see these three guys play? I can’t help but think of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 11:6ff: *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together---and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all My holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”*

Here’s my point---when we exhibit UNITY in spite of our differences, we resemble Heaven to a lost and dying world.

But it’s more than being ONE---and Paul talks about this in the rest of our text. He talks about how as one we WORK together. I’m referring to:

#### 4.) TEAMWORK

Look at verses 10-12 and 15-16 where Paul writes: ***“Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers---to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”*** He says that when we use our different gifts to work together: ***“We will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him Who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*** Using our different spiritual gifts to accomplish a common goal---unifies us in amazing ways---ways that show a watching world that our church is indeed trustworthy. Sometimes we mess up---but that teamwork---that unity---is rebuilt when a brother or a sister loves us enough to confront us with our sin---when, as Paul puts it in verse 15, ***“They speak the truth in love.”*** I could deal a lot more with the importance of loving church discipline---but the point I want us to get this morning is that when we work together---at a church work-day or on a mission trip or in RBC Camp or whatever---that teamwork is an attractive thing.

This week I read a story written by Dr. Ron Bryce a few years ago that illustrates the importance of teamwork. Dr. Bryce writes:

*“One day, as I assisted a surgeon, he had me reach into the patient’s chest and turn his heart so he could work on it from a better angle. As I gingerly swiveled it, he asked, ‘How does it feel to hold a man’s beating heart in your hand?’ In spite of our manipulations, the man’s heart kept thumping as billions of tiny heart cells communicated and coordinated their activities. The cells in your heart rhythmically contract in unity, acting together to produce a heartbeat. If these living cells are separated from the heart in a test tube, they will instinctively continue beating, but not in coordination with each other. If the cells are brought back in contact with one another, the instant they touch, their contractions again become synchronized. That is the nature of heart cells. Individual heart cells cannot accomplish their God-given function*

*alone. They were designed to be one of many cells in one heart. While they serve a unique function in the body, they are not useful if they don't communicate and coordinate their efforts. If the members of an entire body don't communicate, life is not possible. A single heart cell working alone cannot pump blood to the body, no matter how hard it tries. It needs the other cells to fulfill its purpose. This is a consistent pattern found in all living bodies. The only way a body can survive is through its many members working together."*

Of course, the same is true of THIS living body---Redland Baptist Church---and every other church body. Teamwork is essential. United in Christ we HAVE to be known for the way we WORK TOGETHER as a team. So to regain the world's trust Paul says we need:

- Humility and Gentleness
- Patience
- Unity
- And Teamwork.

Let's pray