

"Maintenance Required"

The point of the passage from **Ephesians 4** is that the unity we Christians share is profound, and yet maintenance is required to preserve it. One of the things I've heard a lot in the last year or so is how many people feel disconnected. It's always been a challenge in our busy modern world. The circumstances of the last year have made it worst. They have also made it harder than ever to effectively address the issues. I know I can speak for the church leadership that we sincerely care about fostering a community of Christians learning growing and serving together. We know we also need *all* our members to help us with those challenges. It is one of our priorities as we come through this tough season. This series on *How To Love Life And See Good Days* is just addressing some of the heart issues needed to lay the foundation for a healthy fellowship. This issue will require other initiatives also, but this morning I want to bring this series to a close with a message about a personal commitment God asks of us all. What we see in **Ephesians 4:3** is that **God, who draws us into a spiritual oneness with himself and each other, calls us to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

Let's start just by noticing that.

I. WHEN WE ARE CONNECTED TO CHRIST, WE ARE CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER.

In **verses 4-6**, the word "*one*" appears seven times. *It says, 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, (at this point the word "*all*" becomes prominent) who is over all and through all and in all. In this passage, the Scripture begins *not* by telling us to create a man-made unity that does *not* presently exist but to discover the unity of the Spirit by which God creates a oneness that unites all who believe in Jesus.*

A. Our oneness with each other reflects the oneness of God.

In his commentary on this passage, Scholar John Stott points out seven unities in these verses. Three reflect the three persons of the Trinity. The other four have to do with our Christian experience in relationship to the three persons of the Trinity.

1. First, in **verse 4**, there is *one body*, because there is *one Spirit*. The church is not a building but people. This one body is made up of different cultures and backgrounds. What gives unity to the body is the Holy Spirit, who lives in everyone who receives Jesus as Savior.

2. Second, toward the end of **verse 4**, there is *one hope* that unites us in our calling because, as **verse 5** says, there is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. We believe in Jesus as Lord. We are baptized in his name. Our hope is for His coming and his kingdom. The Holy Spirit unites us, and Jesus as Lord unites us.

3. Third, **verse 6**, there is one spiritual family because there is *one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all*. Once you get to **verse 6**, if you move back up through the verses, you see the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit creating a oneness that unites all in Christ. God the Father creates one family. Jesus as Lord gives us one faith, one hope, and one baptism. The Holy Spirit creates one body.

So, our oneness with each other reflects the oneness of God. Then
B. Our oneness with each other reflects the calling of God.

Ephesians 4:1 begins by telling us *“to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”* Belonging to a community of Christians is part of the nature of our calling as Christians. We tend to think too individualistically as if Christ calls us individually so that he can save our souls, and then we can decide if we want to be a part of a church. In the Bible, you are called by Christ to belong not only to Him but to the church. In the Bible, the church community is not one more responsibility along with work, school, family, and club. It is part of the heart of your calling and your new identity. You are a Christian and part of a community of Christ-followers who belong to God. That's your unique identity that defines who you are, and it is only out of that identity that you face all of life's responsibilities as a follower of Jesus.

Chemists sometimes use a third chemical to combine two components that would otherwise be incompatible. They call the mixing agent a catalyst. It is interesting that the two components bond but they do not lose their own chemical makeup. And the catalyst remains unchanged in the process. Our oneness in Christ is like that. Because of Christ, we become one with people we might not have come together with otherwise. We still possess our individual distinctives, but we are bonded together because of Christ.

If we are going to honor those realities, there is something we have to take seriously. Look at **verse 3** again. It says we are to be *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*.

II. THE UNITY GIVEN BY GOD NEEDS TO BE MAINTAINED IN THE BOND OF PEACE.

The reality of the unity of the Spirit is not at risk but the earthly expression, what **verse 3** calls *"the bond of peace,"* is at risk. The phrase; *"eager to maintain"* translates one word from the Greek original. One scholar who has written about this says it is hardly possible to render precisely the urgency contained in the underlying Greek verb. Not only haste and passion but a full effort of the whole man is meant, involving his will sentiment, reason, physical strength, and total attitude. He also says that it is not an invitation to hope and wait for this but a command to take the initiative to work on it. ¹

A. We're called to work at maintaining our unity in the bond of peace.

One distinctive of the book of Ephesians is that there is no mention of any problems in the church. What stands out is that even in a healthy church, there is a huge need to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Peace and harmony are fragile.

I read a story once about the circus sideshows they used to have in America. People who were unusual or disfigured in some way would sit on stages, and for a quarter, people would go in and look at them. There was a movement to end the shows. But the people in the shows didn't want the shows to end because it was hard to find any other employment, and the sideshows gave them a community in which they belonged. There were articles in the newspapers in which the performers gave their side of the story. *"Who wants to hire a woman with a beard?" one of the performers explained.* Another said: *"We understand each other. We have a community, a group of people who, because of their deformities, accept deformities in others. We are the lucky ones because we understand that people are only people, that the thing you think makes you better than us is an illusion."* ²

When I read this, I was impressed with the human desire for community and belonging. But, as I read on, I discovered that even in this situation, in which these people, because of their deformities, were thrown together with a sense of equality, there were difficulties.

It started with the three-legged man. His name was Frank Lentini he had been born with what was called a parasitic twin, twin embryos in the uterus that never fully separated. The result was a third and fully formed leg and foot protruding from his right hip. Although he could walk naturally, for the show, he started working his hair up into a frenzy. Then he coming out stammering as if in a daze, acting angry and terrified at the same time, pacing around the stage swinging his body around so that the deformed leg would swing out and startle the women and children. This proved to be such a rousing performance that his act was moved to the end of the evening, and his salary doubled. That's caused problems in the close-knit community that had existed in the sideshow. Suddenly there was a hierarchy. As the bearded lady put it: *"Not everybody is lucky enough to get born with three legs. It's not like he did anything to deserve that kind of blessing."*

Interesting, isn't it? That story illustrates both the *desire* for community and the *difficulties* of community. It's not surprising that we desire community. God made us in his image for community with himself and with each other. It's not surprising that we find it *difficult* to nurture community because sin has entered our relationships.

B. How do we work on mainting our unity in the bond of peace?

For that, we have to look at **verses 1-3** together. Paul writes: *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.*

1. All of the qualities mentioned are needed but for a moment, look at how verse 2 ends, "bearing with one another in love."

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a powerful little book on Christian Community titled *Life Together*. In it, he talks about something he experienced. He said he saw that sometimes the person who is most idealistic about Christian Community can ironically become its worst enemy and even come close to earning the title Scripture reserves for Satan, *the accuser of the brethren*. He writes,

Every human wish/dream that is injected into the Christian community is a hindrance to genuine community and must be banished if genuine community is to survive. He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself

becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest and earnest and sacrificial. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself, then enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren accordingly. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. *(Then he becomes an accuser)*

2. What is needed most is not just a program or a plan but a people who model Christ-like virtues.

Five qualities have to be built into our lives. They are all in **verses 1-3.**

1. *Humility*, that's on the inside.
2. *Gentleness*, that's how you treat people.
3. *Patience*, that's how we carry on the gentleness over time.
4. *Bearing with one another*, that's what patience requires.
5. *In love*, because that's what it is all about.

Paul prayed that we be rooted in the love of Christ at the end of **Ephesians 3**. Now he tells us to reflect that love for each other. At the beginning of the *next* chapter of Ephesians, **Ephesians 5:1-2**, we would read these words, *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.* It is God's love for us that enables us to love others and live in unity with them.

Conclusion

God revealed his love in Jesus. He offers his saving grace to us all. You don't earn grace you receive it. You have to believe that it is not your imagined goodness or your religion but his sacrifice that pays for your sins and saves you. When you do, the moment you do, you are reconciled to him and saved by him. Faith in Christ and the love he gives us is what softens our hearts toward others so that we care for them. Faith in Christ strengthens our hearts towards the challenges of community so that we overcome them. Faith in Christ stirs our hearts toward God so that we live to please him *together*.

Amen.

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, quoting Marcus Barth, page 154

² Quoted by Donald Miller, in *Searching For God Knows What.* p. 172

A Prayer for Receiving Christ

Almighty God, Thank you for calling imperfect people into your perfect love. I confess I know and you know that I am worse than imperfect. I am sinful and stubborn. I have often preferred my ways to yours. Receive me, and save me for Jesus sake. I know I cannot and do not deserve this! I believe Jesus died to pay for my sins and rose again as Lord and Savior. I receive and rest on him alone for my salvation.

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, may I grow to increasing walk worthy of the wonderful calling with Which I have been called, 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. I ask in the name of my Savior, Jesus, Amen.

A Prayer for People who need Christ.

I pray not only for myself and the church but also for others who also need Christ. Please send your Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the people you have placed in my life, to draw them to Jesus and make them kingdom laborers. I ask in Jesus' name, Amen.