

# 1/5/2020 - Ephesians 4:1-6

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- [ 0 : 00 ]     The following sermon is from Grace and Peace Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Grace and Peace is a new church that exists for the glory of God and the good of the northeast suburbs of Hamilton Place, Collegedale, and Ottawa.
- You can find help more by visiting [gracepeacechurch.org](http://gracepeacechurch.org). We're stepping back into the book of Ephesians for just a few weeks here this spring.
- And remember that Ephesians 1-3 was all about who we are in Christ. And we're going to step into Ephesians 4. And Paul changes the focus to who we are together.
- And there's a theme right here at the beginning of this passage. I want you to listen for it. See if you can pick out the repeated words. See if you can count how many times Paul uses it here at the beginning of this passage.
- So I'm going to read for us from Ephesians chapter 4. Paul says this, There is one body and one spirit.
- [ 1 : 24 ]     Just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
- But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, And he gave gifts.
- He's picking up an earlier idea from verse 7. And he gave gifts. The apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, the teachers. To equip the saints for the work of ministry.
- For building up the body of Christ. Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. To mature manhood. To the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.
- So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves carried about by every wind of doctrine. By human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love.
- [ 2 : 39 ]     We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head. Into Christ. From whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped. When each part is working properly.
- Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up in love. Amen. This is God's word. Let me pray for us. Father, would you send your spirit to be with us.
- This is a huge passage. It's got all kinds of ideas. I pray that you would settle us. So that we might be able to see you in it. Help us, we pray.
- Help me, I pray. Amen. Amen. Well, on New Year's Day, we helped host a block party in our neighborhood.
- It was pretty great. We had a lot of people that came out. It was kind of a brunch New Year's Day. It was a little bit cold, but a pretty day. And we had dozens of people come out in our neighborhood to a neighbor's house.

[ 3 : 36 ] And it was fascinating because I wasn't prepared for how many different kinds of people showed up. I would say there's probably seven or eight families that showed up that have moved to Chattanooga in the last 12 months.

12 to 18 months. People from all over the U.S. and all over the world. There were international people. There were people of different classes and ethnicities.

People of different cultures. People who had clearly very different ways of interacting in the world. It was kind of comical to watch all of these people interacting. But it was really good. And it was invigorating in a lot of ways.

And it just reminds me that though this is not, Udawah is not, you know, Brooklyn or San Francisco, yet there is a surprising amount of different kinds of people that are living right outside of our front doors.

You know, if you drive around our area, you see a lot of Indian communities. You see Muslims. You see Europeans all over the place.

[ 4 : 41 ] You see African Americans and country folks and soccer moms and Hispanic folks. I don't know if you noticed this, but on Shaliford Road, there's a new Vietnamese church right there by the YMCA.

And the question for us is, how in the world can we be a church that is for all kinds of people when the kinds of people that are there are really different from us?

They're really different kinds of people. In fact, if you just look around this room and you begin to hear the stories of people in this room, you find out that in this room right now there are all kinds of different kinds of people with different perspectives on life.

Well, let me take just a minute to remind you who the letter to the Ephesians was written to. It was written to a bunch of house churches in and around the city of Ephesus, right on the coast of modern-day Turkey, right on the Aegean Sea.

And so because it was a port city, it was a city that was famous for its commerce. People came through there heading into the interior of Asia Minor. And so because of that, it was a place that tons of different kinds of people came.

[ 5 : 51 ] It was a place that was cosmopolitan. It was educated. It was fairly wealthy. And so these churches were full of all kinds of different people. People from all over the known world.

People who spoke different languages. They had different cultures, inevitably different foods. And I'm sure that they had different college football teams that they loved. It was a place of people who were very different from one another.

And yet, Paul is writing to them with this singular purpose that those people are the church. They are, with all of their uniqueness, with all of their diversity, with all of their just kind of normalness, they are brought together as the body of Christ, the location of God's presence in the world.

They've got this huge calling. Even though they're all these different kinds of people, how is it that Paul has this kind of vision? It's really amazing.

Well, I think what he's saying to us here is something that he's attempting to articulate. And he does it in a few different ways. But there are two basic parts to his vision that I just want to look at this morning. We can't do everything in this passage, but we'll get to a lot of it.

[ 7 : 08 ] And there's two pieces to his vision. The first one is that we as the church are to have a united identity. And the second thing is we are to have a diversity of gifts.

A united identity, but with a diversity of gifts. So we're to have a united identity. The clear theme, I wonder if you saw it at the beginning of this passage, is unity.

Did you count how many times Paul uses the word one in just verses four to six? I count like seven times. Seven times he says we are to be one.

You and I are one. Our oneness is because we share a common identity in Christ.

We have one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. That's the gospel. The gospel is this message of good news. The message that the God who has made this whole world and who loves this whole world, this world that is good and beautiful, and yet it's been wrecked by sin.

[ 8 : 16 ] That that God has sent his son Jesus into this world to die for sinful humanity. And in his death, he has begun the restoration of all things.

That we will experience one day the restoration of this entire world that God has made and loves. We are a part of it. We are a part of God's grand story of redemption.

The good news of this world. And because we are a part of that story, we have a common identity together. You and I are fellow participants in the restoration of all things because of Christ.

What that means is your personal story is bound together in this great story. Your story is bound to my story.

Imagine a baby mobile. You know, you've seen these in a crib. It's got like four or five little stuffed animals. There's like a giraffe and an elephant and a sheep. And you know, when the baby gets old enough, it can stand up in the crib and it grabs one side.

[ 9 : 24 ] And if you grab one of the animals on a baby mobile, what happens? All the other ones rock. Because they are tethered together. They're individually out here on their own strand, but they're tethered together.

And so what happens to one member of the baby mobile affects what happens to the others. And we're like one big complex baby mobile.

With all of our families hanging off and all of our friends. And when you pull on one part of the baby mobile, it shakes everybody else. You see, what happens to you affects me.

I am my brother's keeper, to put it in Old Testament language. See, one of our core values at Grace and Peace is that we are connected. That means that what happens with you matters to all of us.

It matters. And not only does that mean that we are connected here individually, but we are connected as a part of Christ's church. We are a connected church.

[ 10 : 36 ] We're connected to the other churches in our area. That's why I pray for Marcellus Barnes and Grace Point. Because what happens at his church in Brainerd affects us. What happens across the highway at Christ's way affects us.

And not only here, but globally. The fact that the Chinese government can walk into a church that is very similar to ours theologically. I don't know if you've heard this.

Early Rain Covenant Church. The Chinese government went in. They knocked down their building. They arrested the pastor. Kept him locked up. Wang Yi is his name.

Kept him locked up for like nine months before they had a private trial. And convicted him to nine years in prison. Because he preaches the gospel. Unashamed.

What happens to him there matters to us. What happens in the abuse scandals of the Roman Catholic Church matters to us. We are united as Christ's people.

[ 11 : 35 ] We are one together. We have a common identity. I mean, the fact is, is that there's so much division in the church.

Especially in a place like the Bible Belt. Where it's been assumed that so many people are Christians. And so you have these divisions on minute parts of theology.

And we're not going to dive too deeply into that today. But I want to say that it's just, it's strange that when Paul is talking about this, he gives this encouragement in verse 3.

That right before he talks about the one body, one spirit, all of that, in verse 3 he says that we should be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

That that's fundamental to our identity is the cultivation of a united sense of identity. That we have to cultivate that unity both in here and outside of here.

[ 12 : 36 ] And let me just tell you, as our country is less and less oriented around a Judeo-Christian ethic, that is going to become more and more, number one, easy, but more and more necessary.

Our job is to be connected and to be one with all of those who call the name of Christ. And the reality is, is that if we, if our thoughts about other churches and other Christians is first and foremost and primarily thoughts of criticism and thoughts of dismissing them for the errors that we think that they're making, boy, we need to check our heart.

Because the chances are, our hearts are not the heart of Jesus. That Jesus doesn't look at those other churches first and foremost finding their faults.

It doesn't reflect his heart for his body. Okay, so that's, that's the first thing. That we are to have a united identity. We are one. One. But, even though we are one, we have this grand diversity of gifts.

We are many. One and many. Unity, diversity. Unity without conformity is the idea. So there's this, this kind of harsh transition in verse seven.

[ 13 : 57 ] One. You've got one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who's over all, through all, and in all. But, there's this oneness. But, grace was given to each one according to the measure of Christ's gift.

And then he digresses to talk about Jesus coming and giving gifts to people and then ascending back up. And it picks up in 11. And then he gives a list of these gifts that God has given.

He's deliberately telling us that even though we have a visible and an authentic unity with other Christians, that doesn't look like uniformity. We have a diverse set of gifts.

Now, there are five different passages in the scriptures that list out different gifts that Christians are to have in the church. And the lists don't overlap very well.

Some gifts are listed and some gifts aren't in different places. In fact, some gifts listed are like really normal and you don't think they're like some sort of special spiritual gift. One in Romans 12 is doing acts of mercy.

[ 15 : 06 ] Isn't that something that everybody's supposed to do? Why does that seem to be a special thing? I don't know. Some people want to draw a lot of conclusions about those spiritual gifts. They want to focus maybe on just a few of the particularly spectacular gifts like tongues and healing and prophecy and preaching and other things like that.

But I actually think that Paul is really general when he's talking about the gifts. And maybe there are even more gifts than what he has listed. But he lists here the offices of the church.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds or pastors, teachers. These aren't all the gifted people in the church. These just happen to be the most visible people.

And the point is, is that there is a variety of gifts for a variety of different circumstances. And they are all important. And if we went and looked at the other lists of gifts, we would see how important and vital for the work of the church those are.

But here's the thing. What is the purpose of each of those gifts? And we can extrapolate to all gifts. Look at verse 12. What's the purpose? To equip the saints for the work of ministry.

[ 16 : 23 ] For building up the body of Christ. Wait, wait. Who does the work of ministry? The saints. If I was to stand here and say, who are the ministers of Christ in this church?

Paul would tell you, it's you. You are the ones called to do the work of ministry. I'm just your pastor. I'm the nobody here.

I'm just the guy who's been called to equip you for the work that you are called to do. When it comes to going out and doing the works of healing, of meeting the needs of the people and the places of this community, that is the work that you are to do.

We have this funny thing in the Bible Belt. I've never actually understood this. My mom used to always say this. Maybe you say it too. But when somebody makes a career choice to, quote, go into the ministry.

I always thought that was funny. They're going to make a career choice to be a pastor or a missionary or an academic or some sort of nonprofit or something like that. They are going into the ministry. But the Bible doesn't make that distinction.

[ 17 : 39 ] The Bible says that every Christian is responsible for the work of the church, for the work of God's kingdom being extended into his world. As the pastor, I have a very limited amount of responsibilities.

I preach. I serve the sacraments. I help lead our vision. The reality is great churches are not born because of great pastors.

We won't become a great church even if I am a great pastor. We'll become a great church because great people like you take your responsibilities seriously using your gifts for the building up of the body.

What's the goal of that? Well, keep going. Verse 13. Building up the body of Christ until we all, all of us, attain to the unity of the faith.

Right? There's the unity. And to the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we won't no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves, carried about by every wind of doctrine, every human cunning by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

[ 18 : 57 ] Rather, speaking the truth of love, we are to, truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.

You, using your gifts, will help us become one and help us to grow up into Christ. You may not think your gifts are all that flashy.

You know, maybe you're good at hosting people. Maybe you are an encourager for people who are in difficulty. Maybe you are just really good at acts of mercy.

You know, going and helping people and serving somebody who needs to be served. Maybe you're one of those people that prays. You've been gifted by God. You pray.

Maybe you're one of those people who just, who's able to step in with suffering people and minister well to them. Maybe you're able to teach.

[ 19 : 58 ] Maybe you're able to lead. Maybe you are somebody who organizes things really, really well. Whatever that gift is, even if you don't think it's particularly flashy, particularly exceptional, the message here is that each act of obedience to God honors what he's talking about in this passage.

Each, we could say it this way, each twig that you put, each piece of kindling that you put into the fireplace of God's people, the Holy Spirit will come down and bring the fire of his life and bring that kindling to life.

And we can't have a fire without you. We cannot be the people that God is calling us to be as grace and peace, as the church in this city, in this country, in this world, as the body of Christ.

We cannot be it without you. Without you exercising your gifts. We can't be one without the many. Without your gifts being expressed in your way, we can't do it.

When Natalie and I were going to seminary, I can't remember. I think we were 24 or 25. We were young.

[ 21 : 18 ] And we had been at this big church in Dallas. And it was one of those churches that's huge, multi-thousands of people. We really didn't know any of the pastors. We didn't feel very known.

And so when we went to seminary, we really were attracted to this smaller church. And we loved it. I mean, it was kind of rinky-dink in a lot of ways. But we loved the pastor. And immediately, like the first couple of weeks, we felt known and loved and appreciated and valued.

And so we went to the, you know, kind of the membership class. And we got to know the pastor a little bit. And we were sitting down with him. And, you know, of course, I thought I knew everything. I was in, you know, I was starting seminary.

And I was 25. So I did. And so we were talking to him. And I said, you know, I mean, it's really great to be at a smaller church.

We've been at this big church, you know. And this is like, this is how the church should be. And, you know, and boo, all those bad big churches. And he stopped me cold. And he was like, you need to stop it.

[ 22 : 20 ] He rebuked me right there in front of everybody. And he said, no. Jesus has gifted each church in different ways. And you need to respect the gifts that he has given.

He said, what you don't understand is you can take 20 churches of our size. And our 20 churches might be bigger than that one big church. But that one big church can do things for the kingdom of God that we could never do, even if we got more people and money together.

He said, you need to respect his gift. Ouch. But it proved the point to me that there is a diversity of gifts that God gives to individual people and to individual churches.

We are still discovering what sort of place grace and peace is going to have in our community. What our role is going to be. But it's going to be a church that is of his design.

And to meet that challenge takes a tremendous amount of work. Look at all the things Paul tells us we need to be able to do in this passage. Verse 1. Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

[ 23 : 31 ] I mean, consistency. Obedience. Okay. Verse 2. With humility and gentleness. That's in short supply.

With patience. I mean, I'm patient, but I know you aren't. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain unity.

Look down in verse 15. Speak the truth in love. Except on social media. Grow up.

He says grow up twice. Look, I've been trying to grow up for 44 years. I haven't made it yet. That the whole body joined and held together.

By every joint with which it is equipped. And each part working properly. It is really hard to do this. To hold together the unity that we have together.

[ 24 : 32 ] And the diversity. I was reminded this week. Well, let me say this first. That it's not just diversity for diversity's sake. It is diversity so that we are fully equipped.

So that we more easily become the people that God has made us to become. We need diversity in order to have unity. Those two things are two tension points.

I was reminded this week by one of you all of a fable that I've told before. It comes from Alexander Jung. Who was one of the recent moderators of our denomination.

And he's also a college professor. And he tells this. He tells this fable about a giraffe. And this giraffe. He moved into a new neighborhood.

It was a super nice neighborhood. And he found the perfect piece of property. It was up on this hill. And he was able to build his dream house. He'd been working a long time. Super excited to build his dream house.

[ 25 : 32 ] And so, I mean, when you went in, you saw that this was perfect for Mr. Giraffe. He had these windows that were really high. The ceilings, you know, soaring.

Really high windows that he was able to look out over the street to be able to see all of his neighbors. And to be able to see the trees that he could eat off of. And in his hallways, they were really tall, the doorways.

He didn't have to stoop to get under any door. Kitchen was perfect for him. It was great. He loved it. And one day, he was in his house. And he looked out. And he saw Elephant walking down the street.

And this was his new neighbor. He wanted to be neighborly. So he went outside. And he greeted Elephant. And they met one another. And he invited him to come back later that evening for some tea and snacks.

Elephant was delighted to meet the new neighbor. And so he was happy to come over. This was a hospitable way to get to know somebody. And so Elephant came over later that evening. And Giraffe was walking him through the house and showing him this wonderful dream house that he'd been at work building.

[ 26 : 38 ] And in the hallway, as they came in the door, Giraffe made it through really easily. But Elephant felt like the walls were pretty tight.

He couldn't, like, turn to see the pictures on the wall. He kind of knocked them as he went by. And when they got into the doorway, he had trouble turning his body because the doorway was really tall, but it was really narrow.

And then when they got into the living room, Elephant couldn't see out of the windows. The windows were too high up. And, of course, Giraffe was disappointed.

He had been trying to be hospitable. He had been trying to do something that would serve his neighbors. And yet he didn't realize that what he was doing was actually making it more difficult for his neighbor.

And it was a wake-up call for him. And the reason I say that fable is because this is part of what happens when we live in a world where we are united under one goal, and yet we have a diversity of gifts and backgrounds and people all jumbled up together.

[ 27 : 48 ] How do we deal with that? It becomes really difficult. Because there's all kinds of things that we assume are going to be helpful that are not. And what Paul is saying is it takes tremendous work for you to live in a world where you can hold these tension points together, to be one and to be many.

And so I just want to give us two particular pieces that will help us, two things that must be practiced by us. The first one is this. We have to learn to ask the question how others are going to experience things that feel natural to us.

How are other people going to experience things that feel natural to us? And this is really hard. How are they going to hear music? This is why music, I'm expecting that there's going to be at least one song every week that you are totally not going to connect with.

And it's a different one for all of us. A song that we wouldn't particularly choose if it was us. That our programs as a church, the language that we use as a church, how are people hearing that?

There are words that might be comfortable for me to say that I won't say because of how I fear someone else might take it. We have to get in the habit of asking those questions.

[ 29 : 17 ] How are we doing women's Bible study? How are we doing missional community groups? How are we doing youth group? And that's just on the church level. When you have someone in your home, we have to begin to ask those questions.

And every once in a while, we're going to be surprised about something that feels completely natural to us that someone takes in totally the wrong way. And when that happens, we've got to be willing to apologize and own it.

So that's the first thing. We've got to ask the question at least. And then secondly, I think in the new year, we must be willing to seek out relationships with people that are really different from us.

This is why I like Marcellus Barnes. Marcellus and I, we're both planting churches, but our churches look really different. His is more of a kind of traditionally African-American gospel church.

He plays music and then gets up and preaches. And he preaches for like, you know, almost an hour. And it is energetic. It's fun. It is. There's no bit of kind of the liturgy that we have.

[ 30 : 22 ] They don't do communion every week. They're a very different kind of feeling church. And I love it. I love it. And he's become a friend, somebody that I really like.

And someday I'll want him to come and for you to meet him. But we need to be able to build these relationships with people. One of the things I'm learning in my neighborhood is I've got all these Europeans.

It's really fun to get to know people who are from different countries. We should make friends with people who have a different church identity. People who have a different political leaning.

People who go to different kinds of places, different kinds of churches. Let me leave you with this. Do you remember that when, in the New Testament, in stories of Jesus, when Jesus went into the temple and he cleaned out the money changers?

He got angry. He got angry. Because the temple, the place of God's presence in the world, had become something it was not meant to be. The temple had become a place that Gentiles were excluded.

[ 31 : 31 ] Outsiders have to stay on the outside. It had become a place that had become mired in the political conversation. It had become a political tool for those in power.

They used the temple to get legitimacy in their own political maneuverings, whether it was the church politics or Herod and the local politicians.

It had also become a place where people were making a buck off of worshipers. It had become a place, the temple had become a place that was corrupted. It had lost its fundamental identity, and it had therefore not been able to utilize the many giftedness of the people of God.

And Jesus came in, and what he did was knock everybody out. And what we need to see from that is that Jesus is passionately pursuing a church that represents the fullness of his body in the world, and there is nothing that will get in his way to accomplish that.

It may not happen in one moment, but Jesus, the church will die that does not pursue the vision that God has for his church.

[ 32 : 46 ] We are his body, and he tells us that those unfaithful branches get cut off. Jesus is pursuing a redemptive mission in this world, and the promise for you is that you can be a part of it.

We, together, can be a part of it. And when we are a part of his redemptive mission in the world, what we find is that our individual lives are made to be who we were, we become who we were made to be.



The only way for us to become the kind of church for all kinds of people is for you to find your place in the gospel and in this room.

And as you do that, we'll find that we're ready for all of those other people. May God make it so for us. Let me close this in prayer.

Father, we do pray that you would give us the ability to minister as you have made us to do. We pray it in Christ's name. Amen.