

A Call to Unity

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[0 : 00] I mentioned at the close of the sermon last week that Ephesians chapter 4 marks a transition in Paul's letter.

! In chapters 1 through 3, the apostle Paul focused on what God has done through Jesus Christ in reconciling sinners to himself and to one another.

In chapters 1 through 3, we have what theologians call the indicatives.

They are statements about what God has done in saving us. And this morning as we continue into chapter 4, we come to the second part of the letter in which Paul tells us how we as God's redeemed community need to live having been reconciled to God and one another.

He tells us this is the way you're supposed to live in 4 through 6. And in this section, we have what theologians call the imperatives, the commands, what God commands us to do.

[1 : 10] The theologian and pastor John Stott refers to this as moving from doctrine in chapters 1 through 3 to duty in chapters 4 through 6.

And perhaps that's a helpful way to think about it. We've covered the doctrine that's going to be the basis or the foundation for the duty that we're called now to live out.

And I think it's important for us to remember the order. It is not duty first and then doctrine. It is doctrine first, the indicatives, what God has done through Jesus Christ, and then the imperatives.

We're not called to do what we are called to do in a vacuum. We're called to do it on the basis of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

And this is important because if we miss the order, if we get duty before doctrine, we end up falling into legalism.

[2 : 17] If we try to fulfill the imperatives before we are settled in the indicatives, starting in the very early part of this letter where Paul tells us how before the foundation of the world, God in mercy and grace predestined to save particular sinners, to conform them to the image of his Son, that they would be holy and blameless in his sight.

We remember all of that, and it's on the basis of that that we now seek to live the way that he has called us to live. It means that we will not try to live the Christian life in our own strength, but we will live it by the grace and strength that God provides on the basis of what he has done in Jesus Christ. And so with that introduction, let us now consider the first duty that God's people are called to in this letter of Ephesians. Please follow along as I read.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Let's pray together.

[4 : 17] Father, we bow in this moment and we thank you for your word. We ask, O Lord, that you would mediate your word to our hearing and to our living.

Would you cause us to hear as we ought to hear this morning? I pray, Lord, that you will enable us to remember this call that we have is based upon what you have already done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so would you help us to hear as such, Lord? And we pray that you would glorify your name in the preaching of your word and that you will build this local church.

Lord, cause us to truly be a city on a hill. We pray that those who are walking in darkness will see the bright light that you have brought to shine through our lives corporately.

We pray and ask these things now in Jesus' name. Amen. Recently, I had the occasion to write a note of condolences to a fellow pastor who lost his father.

[5 : 40] And as I wrote the note to him, I could not help but reflect on my own father. And among the many reflections I had, one that stood out to me more than any other, is the repeated admonition my father would give to me and my siblings over the years, telling us that we needed to live as one.

That we needed to live as brothers and sisters. My mother did the same. And so one of the prominent themes that featured frequently in our upbringing and conversations with our parents was this call to me and my siblings to live as one.

And it's one of the ways that we seek to honor their legacy. And they've done it so much, I don't think that any one of us can really forget that call that call that we have as brothers and sisters to live as one.

In this passage that we have as brothers and sisters to live as one. In this passage that we have come to this morning, the Apostle Paul does something very similar.

The Apostle Paul calls the church to unity. And if I were to summarize what he says, here's what that summary would be.

[7 : 32] I think he says, Here Paul is transitioning from doctrine.

He is moving to duty. He is moving from indicatives and now to imperatives. And the first thing he says to us is, I urge you to be united.

I urge you to maintain the unity of the Spirit that you have redemptively received from God through Christ. This is more than a call for unity, brothers and sisters.

This is a plea for unity. And I think we all can appreciate that sometimes we hear things or we say things based on the experience that we have.

And oftentimes you can hear when someone's plea is informed by reality. And I think that's what we hear with the Apostle Paul. The Apostle Paul understood something about what God had done in Jesus Christ that he was now bringing to bear on the church to say, This is how you must live in light of that.

[8 : 56] I plead with you. I urge you to live this way. For those who are taking notes, I've organized the sermon under two simple points.

And they are first, the call to unity. And then second, the basis of unity. So let's first consider the call to unity.

We find it in verses 1 through 3. Again, as Paul writes these words, Paul is so mindful of the amazing, glorious, saving work of God through Jesus Christ, in which he reconciled these sinners who were separated from him, to himself, and then also to one another.

Jews and Gentiles who are hostile and living apart from one another without hope. And God has joined them in a church. And he now says, You are the means by which I will communicate my manifold wisdom to satanic powers.

Paul is aware that God will be glorified through the church, both now and throughout all eternity. And now he urges the church to live in a manner that would maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

[10 : 25] The Revised Standard Version actually says it this way, I beg you. I beg you. Paul doesn't say, you know, here it is and do what you will with it.

No, he says, I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called. Now why is Paul urging the church in this way?

Why does he beg believers to live in a manner that maintains their unity? I think two reasons are obvious. And the first is Paul recognizes how precious unity is.

He recognizes how precious unity is in God's redeemed community. And then second, Paul realizes that although we enjoy unity with God and with one another, and that's God's own doing, that he has brought us together and joined us together, Paul knows the important role that our actual living has to play in it.

Paul knows that it really comes down in a functional way to how we live. Paul knows that it's not enough to have that truth about what God says about us.

[11 : 52] It's not enough to know the indicatives. It's not enough to know the doctrine about our unity. He recognizes that that has to be functional. That has to get in our feet and we have to walk that out.

And he recognizes that we have to do that with fellow sinners, with broken people in a broken world. And so he calls us and urges us to do that which will maintain this unity.

notice in verse 1 that Paul talks about how we are to walk in a manner.

And that's just language for a way of life, a way of living. It is the way we live in an ongoing way, the day in and day out pattern of our lives.

He calls us to live in an ongoing way, in a manner that is worthy of the calling that we have received. And what he's saying to us is we have received a worthy calling. It's not just something by the way or trivial or flippant.

[13 : 06] It is something worthy. And why is it worthy? It is worthy because God has given it to us. And friends, it is worthy because it has come to us at a precious price. The price of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to reconcile sinners to God and to reconcile sinners to one another in the church.

Here again, we see Paul picking up on the idea of God's calling which we saw several weeks ago in chapter 1. This calling that he's referring to is what theologians call effectual calling, a calling that is effective, a calling that has the power to bring sinners to himself.

It is the call that sinners hear when they respond and come to the Lord Jesus Christ. It's God's voice that comes to them and calls them to himself.

Paul says it's a worthy calling and therefore we must live lives that are consistent with it. Now, the Apostle Paul is going to shortly, in just a couple of verses, begin to talk to us about how we need to address sinful conduct, how we need to put off certain sins and how we need to put on particular virtues.

But I think it's instructive to us that he does not start there. I think it's instructive to us that when Paul begins to lay duties on us, he doesn't begin to address us in the area of putting off sins and putting on virtues.

[14 : 58] He addresses us in this area of precious unity that we have with Christ and one another and he calls us to live in a manner that maintains it.

And I think it's because Paul recognizes something. Paul recognizes that the more we live this way, it automatically addresses those issues of sins and those issues of virtues.

Sins we must put off in the virtues that we need to put on. He recognizes that we'll be better positioned to do so. Notice the virtues that Paul tells us are consistent with living a life that is worthy of the calling we've received.

He highlights three, humility, gentleness, and patience. Now again, remember that Paul is calling us to do these things and immediately you are able to see that when it comes to humility, gentleness, and patience, there's only one experience that really is in view and that's people.

And we could think of the opposite of these virtues and we could see how easily living out the opposite of these virtues will undermine the very thing that we are being called to, which is unity.

[16 : 40] The virtues will promote unity, the opposite of them will result in disunity. And so pride is the opposite of humility.

Pride is when we think of ourselves more highly than we should and we don't esteem others and their interests above our own and we want to have our own way, we want to do our own thing and we want to be self-serving and not others serving.

The opposite of being gentle is being harsh. It's being rough and inconsiderate in our dealings with one another.

The opposite of patience is being impatient. When we are impatient with one another, we don't give space for grace and we don't give time for growth.

And one of the realities of sanctification and living the Christian life and living it in community is that growth in godliness takes time.

[17 : 53] We make progress but it's slow progress, generally speaking. Yeah, there are those times where God turns our lives around in dramatic ways and we thank God for that, but generally speaking, growth in godliness becoming more Christ-like is a slow process.

And so it requires that we are patient with one another. Notice how Paul explains the whole goal of being patient.

In verse 2, he says it's bearing with one another in love. It's not just putting up with one another. It's bearing with one another.

It is sticking in there with one another when progress is slow. It is enduring in the midst of temptations and strains and disappointments with brothers and sisters in Christ and it's all done in love.

We shouldn't miss that. Paul says we have to bear with one another in love. We're not to bear with one another in just the ability to endure pain and be long suffering in different circumstances, although long suffering is an expression of love.

[19 : 15] But he tells us that we have to do this in love. And love is a small word, a simple word, but it's hard to define.

it's best described. And in 1 Corinthians 13, a passage that sadly is often relegated to weddings is one that we need to embrace as we consider this call to bear with one another in love.

And we need to know what love looks like as we seek to bear with one another in the various situations we find ourselves in as we journey together as brothers and sisters in a local church.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in verses 1 through 8 of 1 Corinthians 13. If I speak in tongues of men and angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have and I deliver up my body to be burned and have not love, I gain nothing.

[20 : 44] Here's how he describes love. Love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast. It is not arrogant or rude.

It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things and believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away. As for tongues, they will cease. as for knowledge, it will pass away.

We are called, brothers and sisters, this first duty that is placed upon us after we've considered the doctrine of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and reconciling us to himself and reconciling us to one another, we are called to live in a manner that maintains that unity that we have from God and we are to do it with these virtues and the goal is that we will bear with one another in love because when we do that, we will endeavor, we will be endeavoring to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

peace. I think it is really sobering and humbling to think about what we have been called to.

[22 : 30] To think of the fact that you and I have the ability to disrupt this thing that God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, this shared life, this unity that we enjoy, the peace that we enjoy as God's people.

The peace that has come to us has been preached to us from God. To be at peace with him and to be at peace with brothers and sisters, it is sobering and humbling that we are being told that how you live can affect this peace that you enjoy.

and so you are to live in a manner that is worthy of it so that you will endeavor to maintain this unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

It's something that we all call to steward. We get to steward it. We steward it together and we steward it individually. And when we violate our stewardship, we can disrupt the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace that we enjoy.

And instead of unity, we get disunity. Instead of peace, we get strife. We're called not to achieve it, but to maintain it.

[23 : 58] It's already given to us by God and Jesus Christ, but we are called to live in a manner that will maintain it.

The Apostle Paul has already touched on spiritual warfare. We saw that in chapter 2 where he talks about how God has put us in the church, and through the church, he is demonstrating his manifold wisdom to satanic powers.

And that is a hint of the spiritual warfare that we are engaged in. Paul doesn't hint at it in chapter 6. He actually explains it all in chapter 6, but we must remember that ours is a life that is attended with spiritual warfare.

Satan and those who are with him seek to bring this unity and seek to bring strife among us in an ongoing way.

And so we are called to live in a godly way. We are called to be humble. We are called to be patient with one another so that we give the devil no place.

[25 : 18] peace. And so that we do our part to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace. This is sobering, brothers and sisters, that God has given us this stewardship that we are to

seek to be faithful with.

I think it's important for us to hear what Paul is not saying. there are times when disunity in churches is necessary.

When Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, he wrote to a church that was divided, a church that had strife. And the case of the church at Corinth, Paul says to them in 1 Corinthians 11, 19, he says it was necessary that there were divisions among them so that those who were genuine among them would be recognized.

Sometimes strife and the breaking of unity and the lack of peace is legitimately and by necessity the lot of local churches.

Sometimes churches are divided over doctrinal issues. False teaching seeps into the church and when it is addressed and corrected, sometimes people take sides and some are on the wrong side and it brings strife.

[26 : 56] Sometimes churches are divided over sin issues and over church discipline. Sometimes a popular person in a church may be disciplined and people take sides and some are on the wrong side.

and there is division and there is strife. And when that happens we all have a duty before the Lord in good conscience to be on the side of what is right.

And that's our duty if that should be our lot in this church. but we need to remember that we are not called to worship unity. And when I say worship unity I mean a show of unity.

The true unity we will have, the true unity we will enjoy, those who belong to the Lord, united to the Lord, united to one another, they have that unity. But often times you find that God's people can get into worshipping unity and so you have some churches even though there is decline in morality and in doctrine in the churches because of a show of unity and wanting to be together, they just stay together and they just try to make it, not realizing that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed.

And so what we are seeing around the world and in particular in the United States, a lot of denominations right now are being divided. Churches are leaving.

[28 : 32] There are pastors who are walking away from the truth of Scripture. They're embracing false teaching like homosexual marriage and transgenderism and appeasing the world.

And those who would stand for Christ, they have to stand up against that and there is this very visible indication of disruption and disunity.

unity. Those are necessary. Paul is not saying that we are to embrace that to have a show of unity. He is calling us to true unity and not just the appearance of it.

God be in God. And so this urging of the Apostle Paul comes to all of us. It comes to us certainly corporately, but it comes to us individually as well.

And so I want to ask you, how seriously are you taking this call to you to walk in a manner that is worthy of the call that you've received so that in your living you will be endeavoring to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

[29 : 50] Are you walking worthy of that calling? Not perfect of it, but is there awareness and is there genuine effort to do that?

As we relate to brothers and sisters in the church, are relations being marked by humility and gentleness and patience? If they are, they are promoting the unity of the spirit that we enjoy.

They are seeking to maintain that unity that we enjoy. And I pray as we consider these questions, I pray that for all of us it's yes.

Sincerely yes, not perfectly yes, but sincerely yes. But where it is not yes, I pray that we be convicted to repent and to change and by God's grace to grow.

And the truth is, because none of us is perfect, we all have room to grow. We can all be more humble and more gentle and more patient.

[31 : 14] And that will be true until the day the Lord returns. Perhaps this is a good time for us to consider, are there any relationships that we may have in the church that we are aware they're not what they should be?

Maybe they're strained, maybe there was misunderstanding, maybe there was disappointment. And if that's the case, I believe that the Lord would speak to your heart and say, endeavor to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace, go and seek to regain unity and peace with that particular person or those persons.

Well, that's the first point, the call to unity. The second point is the basis of unity. What is the basis of our unity? What is it founded upon?

Is it just in a vacuum idea that we should do because it's nice and noble? No. It is founded, the Apostle Paul helps us to see in verses 4 through 6, it's founded upon our shared life and faith as God's new community, as God's church.

Look again at how Paul says it in verses 4 through 6. There's one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call.

[32 : 54] One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul tells us that the reason for the unity that we have and are to maintain is first based on the fact that there is one body and one spirit.

we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 13, for in one spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit.

Notice the repetition between all and one. One spirit we were all baptized into one body, Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and all were made to drink of one spirit.

Again, this is not our doing. This is what God does. It's what he does for all those whom he saves. And we are partakers of this one same spirit in the one same body.

[34 : 16] In verses 4 and 5, Paul further tells us the basis for our unity. He says it's in our shared inheritance that we receive from God in salvation.

The one hope and the one faith and the one baptism are all rooted in our one Lord. And they're given to us, not dependent upon us, they're given to us, and we are to recognize them, and we are to accept them, and on that basis, we are to endeavor to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace because we share this common experience together.

Our one hope is a salvation hope. It's what Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1, verse 3, that is a living hope which God has caused us to be born again to through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The one faith that we have is saving faith, which is a gift from God, a gift that he brought to every single person who's ever come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ. The one baptism is the baptism into Christ, which all believers equally experience. Now, he's not talking here about water baptism, because water baptism in so many ways can be varied in so many different ways.

[35 : 55] But the one consistent, without any degree of variation, baptism that we all receive is that baptism into the body of Christ.

it's the Spirit does, which Paul talks about in the verse we just read in 1 Corinthians 12 and verse 13.

And the one Lord is the one Savior to whom we all belong and who belongs to us. And finally in verse 6, Paul tells us that we have one God and Father.

God is the God God is the God and is the and God family. There are no classes in God's family. We have classes in our society. First class and upper class and high class and low class and all those other things, all the distinctions, but in God's family, the one attribute is we belong to him and he belongs to us as our father.

[37 : 06] We are all equally adopted. We all share in the same inheritance from our heavenly father. There are no degrees. There are no distinctions. And this is the basis for our unity.

And it contradicts this unity. unity. And this is why when churches are stratified with people based on distinctions, it is such a contradiction to the truth that we enjoy in our shared relationship with our heavenly father.

people. Again, I remind us that Paul is addressing this issue first. Not calling us to put off our sins, but he's calling us to endeavor to maintain this unity that we enjoy together.

Don't achieve it, we maintain it. I think one of the saddest experiences for a believer in Christ to ever have is to believe that they are not equal joint heirs with other brothers and sisters in Christ. It's to get to a place where though they belong to God, though they call him father and though they are his children, they get to accept their feelings more than the reality of the truth of God's word that tells us that we share all of these precious realities together.

[39 : 07] people are dwarfed out and these are deaf on their ears and they are thinking that they are not an equal sharer in all of these oneness, these onenesses that we read about right here.

And perhaps that may be you this morning, whether you're present or you're listening online, perhaps deeper than your heart, you know you belong to God. But this rich, shared life that God's people have as their inheritance, that is not a present reality for you.

Your reality more is you looking to your circumstances, maybe to your own failure, and your own sin, you're not thinking at the moment about this one hope and one Lord and one faith and one baptism and one Father who is in all and over all.

And so I encourage you this morning to awaken these truths in your mind this morning. I encourage you to believe God's word rather than your own feelings.

I recognize that you are an equal sharer in all that God has purchased and offered and provides for us through salvation.

[40 : 50] Now despite this unity that we have, there's diversity. diversity in the body of Christ.

And so next week the Lord willing, we're going to consider how this diversity operates in unity. How are we able to be diverse, different, with gifts talents and talents and opportunities and many, many other ways that we are different and yet we can maintain this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We'll consider what the Apostle Paul says next week. Let's pray together. Lord, precious is the truth that you have saved sinners and reconciled them to yourself and one another.

You have joined them in the same body and enabled them to be the partakers of the same faith.

yet, Lord, you have called us to live in ways that will maintain this unity that we have received.

Oh, Father, would you help us by what we have heard today to grow in the conviction that we must endeavor to do this day by day.

[42 : 37] I pray, Lord, that we as a result, as a local church will enjoy a richer and greater and deeper unity among ourselves as we embrace this call to live lives that are consistent with it.

Would you do your work among us, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's stand for closing song. The church is one thousand, is Jesus Christ the Lord.

She is the full creation by water and the Word. From heaven he came and sought us to be his holy breath.

With his own blood he bore and for her life he died. Heal us from every nation, yet one on all the earth.

Such a revelation, one Lord, one Savior, one birth. One holy name he blessed, a name, one holy name.

[44 : 46] And two unholy precious with every greatest peace. And two unholy precious with all the earth.

And one holy name he blessed, a name, one holy name. And one holy name he blessed, a name, one holy name.

Till when the visions are in, our longing and the blessed. And the great church rejoins, shall be the church at rest.

The great church, a name, one holy name. Yes, we honor that union, we saw the three in one.

And let this sweet communion with those who rest in one. Oh, happy one, holy, Lord, let this way sing.

[46 : 06] Let us pray.

By heresy's distress. Yet saints their watch are keeping. Their cry goes upon long.

And soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song. Lord, we thank you for the one sure foundation that we all enjoy, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord, he and his saving work are the basis for the unity that we enjoy.

And I pray that you would so work in all of our hearts, not just today, but every day on this side of eternity. That we will endeavor to live in ways that are worthy of the calling that we have received so that we may maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

[48 : 00] And now as you leave today, may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. We're dismissed. If you need prayer, as the others leave, please come. It would be my joy to pray with you. Once again, I look upon the cross where you died.

I'm humbled by your mercy and I'm broken inside. Once again, I thank you. Once again, when I pour out my life.

Thank you for the cross. And thank you for the cross. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the cross.

My friend. Yes, we thank you for the cross. Thank you for the cross. Yes, we thank you for the cross.

[49 : 15] Thank you for the cross. Thank you for the cross.

Thank you for the cross, my friend.