

# God's Uniting Love

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'll turn with you again to Ephesians chapter 4, which if you have church Bibles you'll find on page 977. And I want particularly to focus on the first three verses that we'll be looking a little further of course as well in the passage.

But the first three verses of Ephesians 4, page 977, where Paul writes, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've 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.

On the evening of 6 June 1944, D-Day as we know it, President Roosevelt, President Roosevelt of the US, President Roosevelt went on national radio to address the US nation on the Normandy invasion, the invasion of course that the Allied troops were taking part in.

He explained to the listeners that his address that he gave on the previous evening, that address had made no mention of the Allied invasion, it was only a report of the Allied liberation of Rome from German occupation.

But now in the evening of the 6th of June, at the events of D-Day of course having begun earlier that day, Roosevelt explained to the people, the US people, the events of the Normandy invasion.

[ 1 : 41 ] What had been top secret on the 5th of June was now to be made public on the 6th of June. And in that address, he asked the US people to join him in prayer.

And it was a very simple prayer, but a very moving prayer, that Roosevelt read when he called on God for his mercy, for his intervention, for God to set free a suffering humanity from Nazi yoke, from Nazi oppression.

And he ended that prayer with these words. He said, Lead us to the saving of our country, and with our sister nations into a world unity.

That will spell a sure peace, a peace invulnerable to the schemings of unworthy men. Lead us to the saving of our country with our sister nations into a world unity. So Roosevelt's prayer for peace and unity of nations, of course in the context of 1944, was a very commendable plea.

Unity of nations. What was in the present thought? He said that would end the war. Remove the cause of conflict. Provide a lasting rule work against the schemes, as he said, of unworthy men.

[ 2 : 57 ] The United Nations. End all world wars. Of course we know that that unity was a mirage. No sooner had World War II ended, than the Cold War began.

Then there was the Korean War. Then the Vietnam War. And then other major conflicts, world conflicts. Unity among nations was a mirage. Because of the sinfulness of man.

Because of the greed of man. Because of the pride of man. Because of the sin of the human heart. Jesus himself said, nation will rise against nation.

Kingdom against kingdom. That would happen before Jesus returns. But that reality, you know, notwithstanding. The call of unity.

It's a call that actually we do find in God's Word. But not so much unity between political nations. But unity within the church of God.

[ 3 : 56 ] Unity, yes, that brings peace. Peace between one with another. Unity that does bring about the removal of the cause of conflict between brothers and sisters in Christ.

And yes, unity that does bring about a lasting bull work against the schemes of unworthy men. Unity that Jesus prayed for.

When he called on his Father. When he called with that plea for his people. You read in John 17, that they may be all one. They may all be one.

That prayer that Jesus offered that shows the love of Jesus for his own. That his own should be united in love. Love for him.

Love one for another. And it's that whole aspect of unity. Unity in love. That's really what we're going to focus our thoughts on this evening. I know it's been a wee while since we were last. [ 4 : 52 ] And looking at, you know, the theme we've been going through Ephesians with. Love. The love that's expressed here. Love to God. Love one another. But let's resume.

And as we've been reading there in the first three verses, we see Paul again coming to that theme of love. Where he speaks of unity. The unity of love. The unity in love.

This whole aspect of love within the church. Through the unity of the Spirit. We'll come to, obviously, these details in a moment. But let's just, you know, remind ourselves what Paul's been doing.

Because up to this point in his letter, Paul's been writing of the way that God's purposes for his people have been rooted in the depths of eternity.

And God's purposes revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ when Jesus came to earth. And the love of God in Christ, that's been this constant theme already in Paul's letter.

[ 5 : 53 ] Chapter 1. We remember a few weeks ago now, I suppose, we read of God's electing love. God's choosing beforehand those whom he would call as his.

God choosing in love. God choosing in unconditional love. That love rooted in the God of love. God who saves his love.

Because that's what we read in chapter 2. We read of God's saving love there in chapter 2. God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us.

Even when we were dead in our trespasses. Made us alive together with Christ. God's electing love. God's saving love. That undeserved love.

The undeserved grace of God. God demonstrated in the Son of God coming in love. And that great love, of course, expressed in the coming of Jesus for us.

[ 6 : 53 ] And that great love seen in Jesus being raised to life. And so that we who know him, you who know him, are raised with him. Even when we were dead in our sins.

And it's that love. The love that no one can fully comprehend. Because it's not just the love of God that Paul expresses here.

But the great love of God. That's what saves you. And that knowledge of saving love. The saving love of God. We further read in chapter 3.

Paul's desire that the believers are strengthened in love. That their very lives are enriched through love. That they're enriched through the love of God in Christ.

So that you be more like the Lord Jesus. So that you live a life of love that glorifies God. That you live a life of gratitude. Gratitude expressing your love to the Savior.

[ 7 : 52 ] And so, you know, we're really coming now. Or Paul's really coming now to having spoken of the love of God in Christ. He's now coming to show how that love is seen.

Or how the love of a believer for God is seen in very practical ways. How we show the love of God. Because, you know, the love that we have for God isn't any kind of theory.

You know, some sort of theory detached from reality. It's real love. It's real love. And that love that's seen in the way that Christians live out love.

How we live out the love that God has blessed you with. So you're showing in love what God's electing love has done for you. You're showing in love the saving love of God.

You're showing that love that God has strengthened you with by His Spirit. You're showing that love in action. You've been called in love. You've been saved in love. You've been strengthened in love.

[ 8 : 52 ] Show it. Show it. And, of course, that's seen primarily, not exclusively, of course, but primarily within the Church of God, within the family of God. And so, that's really what we have to focus on then, as Paul focuses on here in chapter 4.

How we grow in love one for another. So that we, the more, seek to be like the Lord Jesus in His love for the Church. Of course, we're doing this in the context of worship.

We thank God for the gift of His love that's reached out to sinners such as ourselves. It's a love that none of us deserve. It's a love that's been freely given so that we might love God and our neighbour as ourselves.

And it's that love one for another that, you know, Paul is so emphatic about. Right at the start of chapter 4, I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called.

And immediately we see what we might call the relationship of love. What I refer to here as the I-you. I-while-you.

[10:01] I-you relationship. I-I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you. So, you know, here's Paul, the Apostle Paul. Paul's love for fellow believers.

I mean, okay, he's a prisoner. He's a prisoner for his faith in Jesus. He's suffering in a Roman jail. And yet his heart is reaching out to these believers there in Ephesus.

And he's urging them to live a life, to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of their calling.

They've been called to know God. They've been called to serve God.

And Paul, with this love of the Apostle, and with all the authority as an Apostle of Jesus, that love, you see, isn't focused on himself.

That love reaches out. It's reaching out to those whom God has given Paul to, as it were, to serve over. To guide them.

[10:58] To direct them. How they should live their lives to the glory of God. And so you see that I-you relationship that Paul is showing him to the believers in Ephesus.

That I-you relationship that comes from the I-you relationship that God has with his children. God has chosen you. He's electing, saving, strengthening love.

And you who love the Lord, it's for you to show love one to another in the I-you relationships. And particularly within the church of God.

Because you see, the relationship that Paul's talking of here, you know, it's that thinking of others more than self. It's the seeking the good of others.

It's that relationship of self-giving love that, remember Paul wrote elsewhere in Philippians 2-3, do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

[12:00] That's the kind of relationship that's rooted and grounded in love. The love of God. And that's the relationship. That's the kind of relationship that every church, every congregation, every relationship in Christ, that's what we need to keep on practicing.

That we don't insist in our own rights. That we-that you give in love. So that when we speak of building the church, we're speaking of building the church in love.

Yes, for the good of others. And for the glory of God. And that's a manner, that conduct, the way of living. Well, Paul expresses in verses 2 and 3 the conduct of love.

And you see there in verse 2, where Paul highlights four qualities, four virtues, if you like, four things that characterize the life of the Christian.

The Christian whose life should characterize or should reflect the calling that the believer has when you've been called to follow Jesus.

[13:07] When you've been called to live as an adopted child of God. When you've been called to live, to live in love for God and love one for another. So, Paul mentions four, if you like, four qualities, four characteristics that really harvest their purpose, notice, the unity of the church.

The unity of the church of Christ on earth. Four things that should characterize the body of Christ on earth. Four things that should characterize the unity of God's church on earth.

With Jesus at the center. So look at the four qualities, four aspects of Christian conduct. What do we see there? We see, first of all, we see humility.

We see gentleness. We see patience. And we see, well, this we're bearing with one another. The old word is sort of forbearance. We'll come to that in a moment. But four aspects of a Christian's life that, as we say, feed into that one purpose.

Unity. The unity, well, of course the unity of God has already given us that unity in Christ, being one in Christ. When you were called, you were united to Christ.

[14:21] But here's Paul saying that believers have a responsibility to preserve that unity, to maintain that unity, to practice that unity, and to do it within the body of Christ, within the church of Christ.

So, let's look at these characteristics. These characteristics that bring about the expression of unity in the church.

Look, first of all, what he says there about humility. Humility. Verse 2. With all humility.

Another way of putting it is to be completely humble. It's that grace, that grace that actually recognises your place before God. What is that place before God?

It's just a sinner before God. And, you know, it's having that recognition of who you are and you're standing before God, knowing in humility that you are to serve him and to serve him in love.

[ 15 : 24 ] And, of course, it's again to reflect the Lord Jesus. Because Jesus came to serve. He came as that suffering servant. He came in humility. He came to serve in love.

He came to give his life for many. And, you know, when we think of Christian humility, it's that aspect of Christian living that, yes, recognises the worth of others that counts others better than yourself.

It's that humility that really, you know, expresses, we might even say, the very mind of Christ, the Lord Jesus, when he made himself nothing, when he took the form of humanity, when he became obedient even to death.

And you see, humility, Christ-like humility, is absolutely essential to the unity of the church. Why do I say that? Well, think of the opposite. Think of the opposite of, well, what is the opposite of humility?

Well, the opposite of humility is pride. Self-centred pride. And self-centred pride will destroy any church, any congregation. Self-centred pride will destroy the unity of the church.

[ 16 : 33 ] Because where there's pride, there's arrogance, there's an esteeming self better than others. And when we take pride in ourselves, we no longer remain united with a brother or sister in Christ.

You know, we can take pride in so many aspects. You know, we can take pride in a denomination, for example. And then we're breaking unity with believers in other denominations, or Christ-honoring denominations.

If I lack humility of spirit, if I humiliate others, I'm not maintaining the unity of the church of Christ. You see, pride is that lack of humility. It's that dividing of brother with brother. And pride denigrates unity.

And pride denigrates unity. Humility. And notice, Paul says there in verse 2, all humility, not just partial humility when it suits you, but at all times, on all occasions, in all circumstances, with all of God's people.

[ 17 : 38 ] Show that humility of spirit. Yes, in that humility of service, and that love, one to another. And, you know, we are, I suppose, by nature, we are so full of pride.

We'll seek God's strength to remove even the slightest trace of what is such an ugly trait in any person, let alone a Christian. Because you see, where there's wholesome humility, there's love. There's that desire to maintain the fellowship, one with another. There's that mutual building up, one with another. You know, so that we're strengthening one another in the faith and in love.

So humility. But then notice, humility coupled with gentleness. The older word, I think, is meekness. But, whether you're reading an older version or modern versions, it's that, it's a strength of character.

As someone said, it's strength under control. You know, a strong personality. But, nevertheless, who still serves?

[ 18 : 49 ] It's that quality that maintains the unity of the body of Christ that, as we said, it doesn't insist on our rights. It's that approach that you have to another in love, in gentleness, not in overbearing, not in overbearing manner.

You see examples of gentleness in Scripture. You go to Galatians 6, verse 1, for example, you know, in relation to a backslidden Christian. and the way that a fellowship, that a congregation restores a backslidden Christian.

Listen to what Paul says. Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. There may be others, people who differ from us in different things, in non-essentials, in a fellowship.

And again, the way that you deal with that, Paul says, 2 Timothy 2, The Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

The way that we speak one to another and with one another, this gentleness of spirit. You read in Proverbs 15, verse 1, a gentle answer turns away wrath.

[ 20 : 14 ] And of course, where do we see that? Ultimately, fully, wholly, we see that in the love of the Lord Jesus. He's the supreme example of gentleness.

Would Jesus say, take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you'll find rest for your souls. So in the church, in our dealings, one with another, we're to show and you're to show, I'm to show the strength of gentleness.

That's looking out for others. That's seeking out the needs of others. And, you know, that denial of, of self-seeking, even just removing any kind of thought of vengeance, revenge, or getting one over another, that sort of, you know, the lacking of self-control.

No. We've got to be, we've got to strive to be gentle. To maintain the unity of the church in love for the glory of God.

Humility, gentleness, reflecting the Lord Jesus. And He displayed gentleness. And He displayed that love.

[ 21 : 26 ] But not, of course, in weakness. There's no weakness in Jesus and His gentleness and humility. The strength. And it's the mark of a strong Christian when he or she shows the graces of humility and gentleness.

You who know the Lord Jesus, you show that strength. Show it in your conduct. Show it by humility. Show it by gentleness. Show that you love God and love others, especially within the church.

One of the most humble and gentle of Christians died last week. Martin Cameron. Some of you knew him. He's a young man, relatively young man in his early 60s.

My sister wrote to me just a day or so after Martin died. And she said this, I don't think I've ever met a lovelier, gentler and more humble person than Martin.

She had no idea that I was preparing this passage. And yet, even my sister in Italy, she knew of Martin as a gentle and humble Christian.

[ 22 : 33 ] Now, of course, Martin had sins like any other sinner. He's a sinner saved by grace. He exuded humility and gentleness. He truly did think of others better than himself.

Why? Because he loved the Savior. He's willing to serve him where God sent him to serve him. We know that Martin now beholds Jesus in that perfect love and glory.

And I say all these things. I don't say to praise man. That's not what we're here to do. We don't praise man in any sermon. But we praise the God who gifted those such as Martin the grace of humility and gentleness.

And we praise God that he so equipped one such as Martin to show forth the love of Christ in his life. And, you know, surely then it's for you and I to strive to be that gentle, humble Christian in our love for God and our love one for another.

But then, Paul isn't finished with the characteristics of the conduct of a Christian in love to develop the unity of the church. What else do we find?

[ 23 : 43 ] We find the qualities of patience and what we've called forbearance. Patience, bearing with one another in love. Now, remember this is the context Paul's writing on, the context of unity expressed and by God honouring conduct.

Well, patience, patience is crucial. Why? Because, again, we're to follow our God and Saviour. Think of God. God's slow to anger. You know, when we disobey and when we fall in sin, God is slow to anger.

We're singing of that this morning. Psalm 103. And likewise for you, for me, we are to forgive those who maybe, well, yes, maybe cause pain in the body of Christ and we don't retaliate with anger.

Certainly not. I mean, think of the picture of the prodigal son that Jesus painted in the parable.

Think of the father. The father, what did the father do when the son went away and spent his money and righted his living?

The father was waiting with patience. Waiting for his wayward son to return to him. And so surely it's for Christians to have that same patience and forgiving love.

[ 24 : 59 ] Being ready, waiting, yes, ready to forgive in love. Ready to be reconciled, yes, to a prodigal in love. Now that sort of, that thinking, that attitude is so counter-cultural.

It's so different to the world. We live in a world that, you know, wants the immediate, wants the, you know, now, now. You know, the sort of immediate self-gratification, for example, that's not the Christian way.

Because if we're to maintain the unity of believers, we're to show patience in the community that God has placed us in. You know, patience that bears with one another in love.

As Paul goes on to express that associated virtue, forbearance, bearing with one another. In other words, you know, we know that we all have shortcomings in our lives, but, you know, it's not just tolerating these differences, but actually getting along one with another.

Setting aside, you know, even our own, our own feelings. Because the spiritual well-being of another is much more important. And notice again, Paul doesn't just say bearing with one another.

[ 26 : 10 ] He says bearing with one another in love. Because that self-giving love reflects God's love for sinners. It's the love that loves the unlovely.

It's the love that loves for the sake of the love of God and that love that doesn't keep a record of wrongs. the love that doesn't major in the minors. You know, fellowships can be so certainly damaged when we do major on the minors.

But we're to bear with one another in love. And yes, there'll be minor irritations in any fellowship. But we overlook them. We're not yet in the perfection of glory.

We're not yet in the perfection of heaven. We're sinners on earth. Forgiven sinners, forgiven by God. And if God has forgiven us, who are we to deny forgiveness to another even within the body of Christ?

But then, what else do we see? We see the unity of love. We've seen the relationship of love. We've seen the conduct of love. And now in verse 3, the unity of love.

[ 27 : 18 ] This verse 3 tells us, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. I mean, you know, what's Paul doing? He's been urging the Christians there in Ephesus to live their lives in a way that reflects their calling.

They're to show others the love of Jesus. They're to show that by the graces that they've been gifted with. The grace of humility, the grace of gentleness, the grace of patience, the grace of bearing with one another.

all these characteristics of the Christian life, they strengthen the believers. And they strengthen believers, they strengthen the church. And again, as we said, with that great view in mind, the unity of the church that this verse 3 shows us.

And notice how Paul speaks of the unity of the church. He speaks of the unity of the Spirit. I think we need to explain that. I mean, you who know God, you have peace with God, how?

How does that come about? Through the work of the Holy Spirit. And we're to strive to show that peace, the peace that we have with God. Strive to show that peace, yes, within the community of believers.

[ 28 : 30 ] As Paul says, make every effort to maintain that oneness that we have one with another and to do it in a spirit of love. And so we all have questions.

We've got questions to answer. And we've got to ask ourselves, are we serious about the unity of the Spirit? I mean, Paul was serious. Think of, you know, I don't know, how unity is so often expressed in public.

Is it two weeks ago, three quarters of a million people, Liverpool supporters, lined Liverpool to cheer on the team that won the Champions League. There was an expression, a public expression of unity.

There's other ways that unity can be expressed. I would have said political unity, but that doesn't seem to happen nowadays so much. But, you know, there's that unity of like-minded people, you know, not just, you know, being together, but showing enthusiasm for being together, for being as one.

How much more, then, the church? How much more the blood-bought church of Christ, the church that's been united by the Holy Spirit? How much more should we show the unity that we have in Christ and show that, yes, in love one for another?

[ 29 : 50 ] And, you know, just in case we forget how crucial that unity is, well, look at verses four to six. Now, I mean, these verses are so packed with meaning and focus.

We're only going to very, very briefly look at them. But, you know, whenever we're tempted to lose sight of that goal of unity, go to verses four to six in Ephesians four.

Because these verses, they show us the basis for the unity of the church. They show us the perfection of unity. And whenever we're, you know, neglecting that emphasis of unity, look at these verses seven times, you know, there's seven times the word one, O-N-E, one is used there.

The unity that Paul shows in God, the unity of God that the church has to take notice of. One Spirit, one Lord, one God, one Father of us all.

You know, when we think of the unity of the church, well, it's more than just something nice. It's not very nice, it's not a very relevant thing to say, but, you know, when we think of the unity of God, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then, you know, God, the unity of God is involved in the unity of His church.

[ 31 : 09 ] And of the Trinity, God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the unity of God is involved in the church. Who are we to conduct ourselves in any way that dishonors God in God's unity?

These are wonderful verses. one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, and Father of us all. Wonderful. Truth to focus on, to meditate on.

But, you know, just as we close our service, then, you know, we should be challenged, each one of us, to strive to conduct ourselves in a way that really shows that we're taking seriously this whole matter of the unity of the church, of the bond of peace that, you know, that God has blessed us with. And to eagerly maintain that unity by practicing the graces that God has gifted to each one of his children. Because that unity, as we said, is grounded in the love of God for sinners.

And to practice unity, unity that should be evident both within a church and from those outside of the church. There should be that awareness, that evidence that we are united in Christ.

[ 32 : 32 ] That we follow the Lord Jesus who came to us in humility. Who came and showed his gentleness as the Son of God. Who came and showed even his love for us.

And yes, who's patient with us when we do stumble and fall and forbear with us even in our times of backslidenness.

So we strive then to seek for the unity of love that, yes, reveals the God of peace. So seek, seek with all your heart. Flee from any sense and any occasion for disunity because that dishonours God.

It's opposed to all the graces that Paul mentions here. The disunity, as we said, that comes from arrogance and pride and selfishness and an unforgiving spirit. These are ills that shouldn't form the part of any congregation, any church where the gospel of Jesus is proclaimed.

But strive with every effort for the good of the church, for the glory of God. Strive to show forth the unity of the church that God gives to us and that for you and for me to show forth, yes, to a world out there that knows nothing of the grace and love of God.

[ 34 : 01 ] Show it by your love, one for another, united together in Christ. Amen. Let us pray. Lord, we bless you for the unity that we know in Christ.

We bless you, Lord, that the Christian is united to Christ and in Christ by faith. But Lord, forgive us for the many times when we fail to show that unity, even in our disunity, in our expressions of disunity.

Forgive us, Lord, for any hint of pride or arrogance or selfishness. Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to forgive one another. Lord, help us each one.

Strengthen us, each one, as we're rooted and grounded in the love of the Lord Jesus. Strengthen us to love you and to love our neighbour, us, ourselves. Lord, help us when we're weak.

Help us, strengthen us, we pray, that we might show forth the love of God, your love in Christ, as we show it one to another. Indeed, Lord, as we show it to the world out there.

[ 35 : 10 ] So, Lord, bless, we pray, all that has been considered, even this evening. May you have the glory in all things. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Amen. Let's close in Psalm 18 on page 21. Psalm 18 on page 21.

And we'll sing from verse 27 down to verse 32. Notice. You save the humble and the meek, but bring the proud down from their height.

You, Lord, will keep my lamp a flame. God turns my darkness into light. 27 to 32, Psalm 18, to God's praise. Amen. eine■ mag.

Amen. Moment. wellbeing. Amen.■ Amen.

[ 37 : 20 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen.