

## **The Walk of Unity**

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.  
(Eph 4:1-7)*

*“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa 133:1). When Jesus stated what the defining characteristic of believers would be, it had to do with their unity: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (Joh 13:35)*

As Ephesians enters its practical section, the very first thing it commands is the walk of unity. For a number of weeks we have been seeing who God is, as a basis for responding to Him. The key word for chapters 1 to 3 is ‘worship’. The key word for chapters 4 to 6 is ‘walk’. There is a walk of unity, a walk of holiness, a walk of wisdom, a walk of harmony.

And coming off this amazing portrayal of Who God is, Paul’s first command is ‘walk worthy of this great God by being in unity with one another’. Unity in the local church is at the top of the list for showing what a great God we serve. After all, if the children of God dislike each other, what can it possibly say about their Father? Or as John put it:

*“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1Jo 4:20)*

So now the first exhortation is for a walk of unity amongst believers. Biblical unity is not friendliness. It is not being merely courteous and agreeable with one another. It does not mean that we never disagree. Biblical unity is to be of one mind, one spirit and one heart. We have the same Father, Saviour, Spirit, destiny, faith and salvation. Unity is not where we lose our diversity. It is where commonality overwhelms individuality without sacrificing diversity. We have so much in common, that our differences are submitted to the greater whole of the Body of Christ. In a world increasingly individualistic, the believer still talks about ‘our Father,’ ‘we as believers,’ ‘us,’ ‘our church’.

Unity in a local church is a miraculous thing. A church is the only place where you will find people who come together not on the basis of culture, age, income group, profession, shared hobbies or interests. Sometimes you look at people so completely different; it’s almost safe to say they have just about nothing in common. How does one hold such a motley crew together? How can you have unity when there seems to be so little commonality?

In any given church, you have, from a human point of view, a breeding ground of possible conflict- differing needs, differing struggles, differing backgrounds, differing ambitions, differing philosophies, differing standards of living. We've already seen how God has removed all legitimate grounds for division in chapter 2. But now we see how He expects this to be fleshed out in the church. Like we saw last week, this hinges on being controlled by the Holy Spirit.

Now, this kind of unity is not to be sought on a worldwide ecumenical scale. Sadly, there will never be worldwide unity amongst professing Christians until the Lord comes. But the focus of the New Testament is not the unity of all Christians in the world; it is the unity of local churches. If local churches were made up of humble, harmonious Christians, we would more than likely have far less churches and denominations. If all Christians submitted to the patterns here in Ephesians 4, we would not have the kind of problems we see worldwide. But our goal is obey this command on the local church scale. It is to be sought on a local church scale. Then, outside our local church, we are to be in unity with other believers as far as it is Biblically permissible and practical.

*"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

## **I. We must submissively acknowledge the Unity that exists**

Recall that we have been saying that the duties of chapter 4 to 6 are based on the doctrine of chapter 1 to 3. The things we have seen we are to believe about God – why He is so blessed according to 1:3, these are the things that are to motivate our behaviour. The doctrine leads to duty, the faith leads to work; the worship leads to a walk.

So here Paul is helping believers see that in God, there already is a unity that exists between Himself in the Trinity, and between Him and his people. God in Himself is three Persons, and yet is in unity. He does not argue with Himself. There is unity in the Godhead. Paul showed us this in chapter 1, when He successively showed how Father, Son and Spirit work together to accomplish their plan to glorify their name. Furthermore, Paul showed how God's people are now saved, sealed, wedded to Christ in a permanent, eternal bond. God is not going to break up with us. Now the Bible says – believer, submit to that! Our oneness flows out from God's oneness. Consider Jesus' prayer in John 17:

*"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are." (Joh 17:11)*

*"That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (Joh 17:21)*

*"I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (Joh 17:23)*

God is in union with Himself, and with His people – it is only fitting that His people be in union with one another.

This is a standard we are initiated into, it is not a phoney thing we try to conjure up. This unity is much greater than my little agenda. It is bigger than my wants or wishes. It is bigger than my reputation or my recognition. It is a profound spiritual unity, begun in the Trinity, and emanating through all His redeemed. This kind of unity is impressive and humbling. It teaches the younger that my wants and wishes must be subordinated to the greater.

Paul cites seven things which make up this existing unity which you become a part of when you are saved:

*One body* – there is one body of Jesus Christ throughout the world, there are not many bodies of God – one Islam, one Hindu, one Buddhist. No, there is one body of Christ.

*One Spirit* – there is one Holy Spirit that regenerates and indwells all believers. God does not cause a different angel to indwell every believer that comes to Christ; His same Spirit indwells all of us.

*One hope* – one destiny. We are not all going separate ways. We will all end up conformed to Jesus Christ and with Him in eternity.

*One Lord* – that is the Lord Jesus. We have one Master, not many, one Shepherd that we follow, not many.

*One faith* – one main body of doctrine that all believers share. We may disagree on non-essentials, but all believers share in this one faith once delivered to the saints.

*One baptism* – probably refers to the baptism of the Spirit. *“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1Co 12:13)*

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all - we all have the same Father, making us brothers and sisters.

Now this kind of unity is deeper than any other unity possible. What other human society, what other fraternity, what brotherhood, yea, what religion can claim to have the same Spirit in them, following the same Master, with the same Father, with the same destiny, entered in by the same Spirit-baptism, holding to the same faith? What unites us is greater and will always be greater than anything that we claim can divide us.

So as we become believers, we are to tread lightly, entering in with a reverence that holds this awe in high esteem. That leads us to the next point:

*“With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”*

## **II. We must Sustain the Unity the God Has Made**

Since this unity exists, we are to be under the control of the Spirit, so as to do everything possible to maintain and keep the God-given unity. Notice the words, ‘the unity of the Spirit’. This is a unity found in the Spirit of God, as we individually submit to Him. We

spoke last week about being under the control of the Spirit. As we continually humble ourselves and place our faith in Jesus Christ, the Spirit will enable us to imitate Jesus, and the body of Jesus will be in harmony with itself.

*‘Bond of peace’* – underlines that this is a union, a bond which is peace. The members are at peace with God, and so at peace with each other – this provides an unbreakable bond.

And though this unity is maintained by being Spirit-controlled, the Bible says, *‘endeavouring to keep the unity’* and the word in the original is very strong – suggesting do all in your power to keep the unity. You give 100% effort to maintain the unity, and the Spirit will give you 100% enablement.

Well, what is a threat to this God-given unity? The answer is very simple: pride - pride in ourselves, and responding proudly to the pride of others. This is what will fracture the God-given unity in a local church.

*“Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom.” (Pro 13:10)*

4 reasons why pride causes conflict in a church, or for that matter anywhere:

#### **Pride introduces competition**

Pride is essentially about proving I am better than others. Pride jostles for recognition at the expense of others. And once there is competition amongst God’s people, you have envy, and envy’s twin – despising each other.

*“Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another. (Gal 5:26)*

*“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”*

#### **Pride introduces partiality**

Pride produces classes, and cliques in a church. The ‘in-groups’ and the extra-spiritual elite. Instead of having one body, we have bodies within the body. People receive better or worse treatment depending on their suitability to fit into the group.

*“Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.” (Rom 12:16)*

#### **Pride introduces irresolvable conflict.**

Pride is all about ‘my way’. Pride wants its own way above all else. The body of Christ is all about Christ’s way. When we are proud, we will produce conflict that cannot be resolved until we humble ourselves. “

*“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” (James 3:14)*

*“From whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.” (Jam 4:1-2)*

### **Pride introduces selfishness**

Pride makes everything resolve around me, while I either am indifferent, neglectful, or outright reject the needs of others in favour of my own. And as the illustration of the human body shows – if a lung was to be selfish, it would hurt all of the body, and eventually hurt itself as well.

*“We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” (Rom 15:1-3)*

Pride is the ever-present problem. There will not come a day when pride leaves your soul or my soul. We can always say no to it, but the threat of pride hurting the unity is present in the best and most established churches.

So, how do I maintain the unity? In the power of the Holy Spirit I do my absolute best to preserve the unity in humility.

Notice 5:21, one of the results of being filled with the Spirit: *“Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”* In other words, continually humble yourselves before one another, so as to put out the fires that pride begins. Submit to one another, instead of trying to rule one another. When controlled by the Spirit, we are humble. The posture of humility is part of being Spirit-controlled. A Spirit-controlled character is like oil - lubricant between personalities.

Notice each of the character qualities are *preservatives*. In other words, they are qualities that counter the effects of the strain that is placed on the unity by pride. They are like reinforced steel that keeps bearing up, and refuses to crack, to keep this wonderful God-given unity.

Let's see them: **lowliness, or humility**. When someone is selfish, you should be humble, instead of pushing for your selfishness. When someone is boastful, you should be humble. When someone pushes for their rights, you should serve. When someone asserts their rights proudly, you should douse that fire with lowliness saying, “I’m just saved by grace, I don’t deserve anything here”

*“Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (1Pe 5:5)*

This is the starting point. If all believers were clothed in humility, none of us would need to exercise the other three graces. Humility will prevent you from becoming a source of contention.

**Meekness** – this refers to taking injuries or mistreatment in a Christlike way. Meekness is not weakness. It is power under control. It is a fruit of the Spirit. So when someone else's pride insults you, provokes you, takes something from you, hurts you, in some way harms you by word, by deed, by doing something, or by not doing something – meekness, which is refusing to strike out for revenge or retaliation. When someone provokes you, be **meek**, keep your reaction and power under control; take the insults on the chin. This is way we respond to injuries; also by refusing to provoke others.

*“Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.” (1Pe 3:8-9)*

**Longsuffering.** This refers to being ‘long-minded’. It is an attitude which says, “I have not yet reached the end of my patience with this person”. When working closely with other people it is going to be the little things that can cause the biggest problems. The way they say things, the things they forget, the habits they unwittingly repeat, the things they continually forget to do, the things they seem to do on purpose to annoy you. They are like that tiny pebble in your shoe. In the Song of Solomon, the lovers say to each other:

*“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes.” (Son 2:15)*

It is the little foxes that can ruin all the grapes – but only if you let them. The way you do not let them is by the Spirit-produced attitude of longsuffering. Longsuffering does not magnify what irritates it; it passes it over, it shrugs it off. It does not focus on trifling matters of other fallen sinners. It refuses to let the failings, habits, personality traits, mistakes and even sins of other believers cause it to erupt in sinful anger. Expect the perfection in them that is in you. Do not allow imperfection to exhaust your patience.

**Forbearing one another in love** – *“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” (1Pe 4:8)*

When people are petty, cliquey, immature, lazy, indifferent, spiritually backslidden, then bear them up as sheep that need growing. Certainly there is a time for rebuking, correcting, instructing. There is a time for even discipline in the case of persistent unrepentance. But the whole focus here is in love, bear each other up. We are all works in progress. Do not be tolerant of one another's sin. But be tolerant of one another as sinners.

The whole idea here is to protect the God-given unity. Don't let your own reaction get in the way of God's unity. If someone else is breaking the unity in pride, you do your best to maintain it with humility, meekness, longsuffering and love.

We maintain Christlike unity when we behave in Christlike ways. You lose it only when you behave in unChristlike ways. This kind of unity exists naturally between all true believers. God has removed all things that could legitimately divide us. Therefore, when we are divided, it is illegitimate. It is something we have sinfully introduced. Unity is a command, not a recommendation. God says to His children – no fighting!

So we must acknowledge the unity that God has created. Then we must be humble and Spirit-controlled so as to maintain the unity and avoid the pride that destroys unity. The third thing we are to do so as to sustain the unity is to...

### **III. Appreciate the Diversity.**

*"But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."*

The 'but' shows us this is a slightly different direction. Paul is saying we are one, but we are not the same. We are in unity, but that does not mean uniformity. We are not divided, but we are different. God has given to every believer a different task, a different role to perform, a spiritual gift, a calling. And for there to be unity, we must appreciate the diversity and submit ourselves to it. God wants His people to know that His Body is going to be made up of people with differing abilities, differing roles, differing positions, and differing functions.

*I Cor 12:11-27: But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1Co 12:11-27)*

And there are two wrong reactions to this order. One is self-exaltation. It sinfully and foolishly thinks that it can gain the praise of man if it aspires to prominent positions in the church, or exercises very showy talents, gifts or abilities. And so, instead of submitting to the role God has for them, they kick against God's plan, and end up fracturing the unity as they try to climb the church career ladder. They envy and compete and rebel against authority to exalt themselves. The unity is disturbed by their self-serving ambition.

The other wrong reaction is self-pity. It says, "Well, no one wants me. No one wants to make use of me. I don't have the abilities of others, so I'll just fade into the background." But they are a critical part of the body, and by doing so, they rob themselves and the local body of their critically important gifts. The unity is disturbed by their indifference, by their reluctance. It is not as obvious as the one seeking position, but the body hurts just as much.

We must recognise the order, and willingly partake of it. We must not seek roles that are not given to us, but we must not neglect the role that is given to us. Understand the order. Understand your crucial place and that of others. Harmonise.

*"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;" (Rom 12:3-10)*

To reflect God's unity within Himself, to reflect God's permanent unity with His people, we must have unity. The only enemy of this God-given unity is pride. So, we must submit ourselves to God the Spirit and to each other, being humble, meek, longsuffering and bearing with each other in love to combat the pride in ourselves, and respond correctly to the pride in others. We must submit to God's plan for the church, respecting the positions and task God has for others, and being gladly submissive with the task God has given us. In so doing, we will not have to create the unity – we will simply preserve, maintain and keep the wonderful God-given unity we have in Christ.

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