

Ephesians 4:3-6

December 30, 2018

There's a story I heard about a couple of churches in a small town back East that went by the same name, yet met in locations only a mile apart. But the two churches used to be one church. So, how did they become two, you might ask? Well the story goes that fifty or so years ago the only church in town was having a Sunday afternoon picnic, and two ladies who didn't care much for each other both brought fried chicken. The preacher, not knowing that there were two different types of fried chicken on the serving table, selected a piece for himself, and after eating it, proclaimed for all to hear that it was the best chicken he'd ever tasted. The lady whose chicken he spoke of beamed with pride, but the lady whose chicken had not been tasted took offense, and within a few weeks her family and friends had packed up their things and moved on down the street to establish a rival church by the same name!

That story would be far funnier if it wasn't for the sad fact that it is true. One church actually became two over a piece of fried chicken! And churches like these have been dividing over issues as silly as this for as long as they have been around.

That's because it is far easier for us to get hung up over petty offense and personal preference than to

focus on what we have in common, the things that actually unite us. Things that have been given to us by God himself when he called us into existence and joined us to him as a gift.

(Prop) And when it gets right down to it, what we have in common, our unity, is an amazing gift from God. One we've been called to walk in. Let's not fail to do so.

The Apostle Paul knew of this beautiful gift and spoke of it frequently. He also knew that churches he founded took it for granted and lost sight of it. Especially when thoughts of their differences took center stage and became more important to them than what God had so graciously provided. Many of Paul's letters inscripturated in our Bibles today were at their core pastoral pleas to live out the gift of unity.

Take for example his letter to the Philippians. Many scholars believe that Paul wrote Philippians primarily to restore unity between two church ladies who had been arguing over something, perhaps something not much different from 1st century fried chicken. He even called the two ladies out by name and pled with them to "agree in the Lord" at one point. (Philip 4:2)

But his most impassioned plea for unity was one he wrote to his "home" church of Ephesus. Ephesus had

been the last church he extensively served prior to his Roman imprisonment. His ties to that church were strong. So when he finally set about penning a letter to them from a prison in Rome, his words were heartfelt and sincere.

And it is these words that will serve as our text this morning.

Ephesians 4:1-6

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.

There is one body and one Spirit-just as you were called in 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.

It is important to note that these verses are the first commands Paul issues to the Ephesians in this letter. He spent the entirety of the first three chapters telling them all about God's work for them, mixed in with a smattering of Pauline prayers for them to better appreciate God's work for them. But not once in chapters one thru three does he tell the church what

to do. It's as if he wants his readers to sit back and ponder what God has done and just be amazed...at God and Jesus and the work of the Spirit...and be amazed!

So when we finally arrive at chapter 4 he wants our minds to be blown away by just how worthy God is. He is so worthy to follow. And following Him by walking after him is precisely what he calls us to do.

But in 4:3, Paul adds a surprising caveat to this command to walk. He tells us to walk in unity. "Unity with whom?" "Unity with what?" we may ask. Unity implies that other people are involved. I thought my walk with God was my own business. I can be humble. I can be gentle. I can be patient all on my own (4:2). And I can even bear with others on those rare occasions that others get in my mix. But why do I need to walk in unity with them? Why is that necessary?

And furthermore, why does Paul speak so strangely about this unity? Note how he words it in 4:3. He says, be "eager to maintain the unity",
When He could have said:

- Be eager to generate unity, or
- Be eager to create unity, or
- Be eager to get on the same page

But he doesn't! Rather he tells us to **maintain** the unity. He speaks as if this unity already exists. This unity Paul speaks of is not a man made mind meld. It's not a sentimental "Can't we just all get along?".

The unity Paul speaks of is **the unity of the Spirit**. It is God's doing. It is God's creation. It's a God given unity!

And fortunately for us, Paul does not leave us to wonder what this unity looks like. To help us wrap our minds around this concept of God given unity, he devotes the whole verses in Eph. 4 to help us out.

Our unity is worth pondering

How does Ephesians 4 describe this unity? Let's take look at verse 4.

"There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called in one hope that belongs to your call"

The gift of one body:

According to verse 4 this consists of "one body". What does that mean? What body is Paul talking about?

Well, if we look back at what Paul wrote earlier in this letter, we will find our answer. In chapter 2, Paul tells of a remarkable thing that happened as a result of

Jesus' work on the cross. He speaks of two hostile groups of people (Jews and Gentiles) who had little in common and rarely mixed in society. The Jews did not participate in the pagan festivals of the Gentiles; nor did they eat their food; (no bacon and no shrimp carbonara). In fact, in the name of maintaining purity the Jews went so far as to exclude Gentiles from their unique worship of God. This exclusivity amounted to much hostility between the two groups.

But Jesus burst upon the scene and changed all that. Let's take a look at Ephesians 2:14 and see what he did.

"For he himself is our peace, who had made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility."

Ephesians 2:14-16

Do you see that? Jesus made the two groups one. He created one body out of two hostile peoples...and he did so by dying on the cross. He destroyed the hostility between Jews and Gentiles through his cross.

Usually, when we think about the things Jesus did for us on the cross we think of:

- Forgiveness of sin
- and eternal life with God in heaven
- But not unity with other people here on Earth

But that is exactly what he has done. He has created for himself one body. But he did so with some help.

The gift of one Spirit:

Let's continue looking into Ephesians chapter 2 to see who else is involved in making us one.

"For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father" Ephesians 2:18

Notice the term "one Spirit"... and notice what this Spirit does. The Spirit provides access to the Father; access we never had before. In effect, the one Spirit of God joins us to God himself and makes us one with him. That's amazing.

But that's not all this one Spirit does. Take a look at the previous verse, the one we skipped over.

"He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. Ephesians 2:17

So the Spirit preaches to us, he is the one who informs us of the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus dying on the cross, and in this passage, that good

news is specifically linked to peace... a peace with God and a peace with our formerly hostile brethren.

That's why it is called the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:3). The Spirit bonds us vertically to God and horizontally to one another, all in a bond called peace.

But it is this preaching of the Spirit that brings us to our next description of unity in our base text. For it is through preaching that the Spirit calls us, and embedded in that call is one hope.

The gift of one hope:

For what does it say in 4:4: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope," a hope that is embedded in the good news we hear. For it is this hope that draws us to Jesus... that makes him attractive to us. It is this hope that makes us want to heed his call.

And curiously Paul calls it "the one hope". It is a hope that every follower of Jesus has in common. We all are called to this same Jesus motivated by this same hope. A hope that includes things like the promise of

- Forgiveness of sin
- Peace with God
- And peace with one another

Think about this. Every fellow believer that you do life with, many of whom are seated around you right now, shares the same hope in Christ that you do. All of us desire peace with God and one another. All of us desire forgiveness and eternal life. All of us desire a relationship with the same Lord and Savior. We all share the one hope.

It is this hope embedded in the Spirit's call that marks our entry point into the one body. How do you become a member of the body? You respond to this call of hope, drop everything and follow hard after the one Lord.

The gift of one Lord:

The fifth verse of Ephesians 4 brings us to the one Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is this Lordship that Paul has in mind when he declares, "There is one Lord" in our text (4:5). Because every follower of Jesus, joined to his one body submits to him as Lord.

For it is not enough to be drawn to the hope of his promises alone. True followers of Jesus make him their master. They give up their lives for his sake. They

make his priorities their priorities. But they do so because he, as their one Lord, is worth it.

The gift of one faith:

But to make him their Lord requires the one faith. We must believe in our Lord and Master and be convinced that he will deliver what he has promised. This belief is what we call faith.

But where does this ability to believe come from. Is it something we conjure up in ourselves? Something we can do on our own. No it isn't. It just so happens that like the one hope and the one Spirit it too is a gift.

Paul even tells us so in the second chapter of this letter. Take look at this famous passage:

"For grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is the gift of God."
Ephesians 2:8

Our ability to believe that Jesus is who he says he is and will do what he says he'll do is a gift from God. When he calls us in the one hope he gives us the one faith to properly respond to the one Lord.

And it is the same faith that every believer shares... all through history. Do you realize that your faith in Jesus

is no different from that of Paul and the other people in the Bible? It is the same faith that the church fathers had and the famous reformers and every Christian believer in history. We all have been given the gift to believe the same truth about the same Lord.

And when we first received that faith and exercised it we received another gift in response...the gift of the one baptism.

The gift of one baptism:

Whenever one first heeds that call to follow Jesus, and believes in him, someone comes to live with them from that day forward.

And this person comes to live in an overflowing way. Take a look at how Jesus described this experience in the gospel of John.

“Whoever believes in me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive.” John 7:38-39

In essence, this gift of the Spirit of God immerses us with his presence and empowers us to live for our Lord and follow him in everything we do.

This immersion in the “living water” of the Spirit is called baptism elsewhere in Scripture. In John 1:33 Jesus is described as the one “who baptizes with the Holy Spirit”.

“This is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit”. John 1:33

So the one Spirit is sent by the one Lord to provide the one baptism in everyone who believes.

And that’s not all. For the one Spirit takes up residence in our hearts, someone else comes along...someone called the one Father.

The gift of one Father:

Let’s reread Ephesians 4:6. There is “one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all”.

Did you hear that? Not only is the Spirit living in us, but the creator God of the universe is too. He is over all and through all and in all!

This is the same Father God who

- Blesses us with every spiritual blessing (1:3)
- And who chose us before the foundation of the world to be included in this one body. (1:4)

It was his plan all along, and he is the One who wanted it all to happen.

- He wanted to adopt us as sons and daughters way before he even created the world. (1:5)
- He wanted to be a Father to more than just his Son.

And He did what was necessary to make that happen!

So, brothers and sisters, as we can see from our text, this unity is an amazing gift. And gift is the operative word. For every one of these seven aspects of unity is God's doing, not ours.

- God the Father is the one who
- sent his Spirit.
- and called us in hope.
- and set Jesus as Lord
- and granted us faith to believe
- and baptized us in his Spirit
- and last but not least...joined us to one body

And curiously it is this one body that is the only thing on this list that is visible to us. We cannot see God or hope or faith at work except in the lives of real people... people to whom we have been joined. That is the only place it is visible. If you want to see God; if you want to increase your hope and build your faith and grow up in Christ, look no further than to those to

whom God has joined you to in your local church. That's where the real life is. That's where the unity is.

Our unity is worth living:

Pondering the unity is absolutely essential, but it is not enough. We must also do something about it. We must live it out.

Up to now, I've virtually ignored the key verse that tells us what to do... the verse that commands us to "to maintain the unity of the Spirit".

So let's slow down and listen to what this verse actually says. First of all we must

Maintain unity

Maintenance of anything requires hard work. It doesn't come naturally. There is a reason "maintaining unity" is a commanded in Scripture. It's because, left to our own devices we will not do it and in a very real sense we cannot do it.

How can a collection of such diverse people walk together in unity? Look around. Seated here this morning is a whole bunch of people who are very different from you.

- Some are much older than you, while others are so young and immature.
- Some have way more money than you while others are drowning in debt, struggling to put food on the table.
- Some are struggling with addictions that you cannot relate to.
- Some watch that “other” cable news channel.
- And some just flat out root for the wrong sports team.

Are any of these issues worth getting lathered up over?...of course not. But without a steady diet of truth from God’s word...truth about what actually binds us together, something as simple as a piece of fried chicken can cause unnecessary division.

Let that not happen here!

How can such division be avoided? Paul tells us a little later in this chapter

...by speaking the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)

And speaking the truth is important... because much division can result from rumors, untruths and lies.

And an important way of maintaining unity is by defending it, guarding it and protecting it against such lies. Therefore we must also:

Defend unity

Later in Ephesians Paul reminds us of what we are up against. There is a father of lies prowling around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8)

It is helpful to remember that we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil. Eph 6:12.

And it may surprise you to learn what the remedy for such attacks is.

Yes, we need to speak truth to one another and make every effort to maintain unity.

But Paul gives us something else to do. We are to defend our unity

...by praying in the Spirit (Ephesians 6:18)

For it is the Spirit of God who joined us together into one body in the first place and there is no one better at defeating Satan's lies than the Spirit himself.

And the Spirit is eager to do just that for us and to empower us to maintain the unity with "eagerness" ourselves.

Which brings us to our final point of application. We must:

Celebrate unity

For we are not just required to maintain unity, but according to 4:3 we are to do so eagerly. The word "eagerly" denotes an attitude of gratitude, hopefulness and joy. Just as Jesus once endured the cross for the joy set before him (Heb. 12:2) so we too can do the hard work of maintaining unity...for the joy set before us.

Paul gives us a rather practical way to do this. We can celebrate God's unity

...by singing and making melody to the Lord
(Ephesians 5:19)

For God and his gift of unity to us is worth celebrating.

With the New Year approaching we have a golden opportunity to put this into practice. It's that time of year when many of us like to make resolutions... to evaluate our lives and look for ways to do things better going forward.

This year, why not make a biblical resolution...one commanded by God himself...in his Word? Why not resolve to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace together with the body of believers to which you are joined?

- A unity that his Son died to create
- A unity that binds us together in peace
- A unity that cannot be broken
- A unity that ties us eternally to both our Father in heaven and to our fellow brothers and sisters right here and now.

2019 promises to be a year of God's continued

- Faithfulness to us -> He'll never forsake us.
- Power within us -> He'll never abandon us.
- And Life among us -> He'll never leave us.

Sure...there will be

- Sins to repent of
- Offenses to work thru
- And challenges to overcome

But when it is all said and done God's gift of unity will remain. And our call to live it out will persist. And by the promise of his grace and the power of his Holy Spirit we will not fail to do so.

PRAY-

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:20-21