

## PRACTICING OUR UNITY

Ephesians 4:1-6

Pastor Doug Roman, Bible Baptist Church

Sunday AM, July 4, 2010, Part 1

*In the days before our national independence, the foundation of a free and prosperous country had to be laid. The foundation was unity! Benjamin Franklin's political cartoon "Join, Or Die" and Thomas Paine's pamphlet, "Common Sense" illustrate that unity was critical to liberty. The foundation of unity in the early history of our country is much like the unity that Paul called the Ephesians church to practice—not to establish an earthly kingdom but to propagate a heavenly one. This morning we will see two aspects of unity the Apostle Paul desires for us to observe as well.*

**Big Idea:** Every believer is an important link in the chain of unity in the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4 has two major divisions, vv. 1-6 and vv. 7-16. The first six verses deal with *unity through consistency*. We share a consistency of practice and doctrine. Like one team in a tug of war, we are all pulling the same direction. Then vv. 7-16 deal with *unity through diversity* (cf. Moule, *Ephesian Studies*, 179). Like a body, each part, though different, in concert with the others for the benefit of the whole (v. 16). We each function in a unique God-given capacity in the body of Christ: "to each one of us" (v. 7). We will spend the next two Sunday morning looking at vv. 1-6.

### 1. A Call to Practical Unity (vv. 1-3)

The word "walk" highlights the practical application of the glorious doctrines of Ephesians 1-3. We will discover the details concerning the walk that is worthy of our calling.

#### A. The Exhortation to Practical Unity (v. 1)

The word "therefore" also teaches us that right actions logically follow from right doctrine, which is why Paul uses the phrase "I urge you"—there's the exhortation.

#### B. The Expansion of Practical Unity (vv. 2-3)

What are the qualities of a person who walks worthy of their calling and thus advances unity in the body?

- 1) Humble. "Humility is that grace that, when you know you have it, you have lost it" (Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, 95). Think of a level: we are all on the same level. In order for us to be a humble people we must remember our spiritual roots (cf. Eadie, *Ephesians*, 268). We have been elevated to royal status, seated in the heavenlies, from the depths of extreme sinfulness and utter depravity.

Humility drives *evangelism*. "We are all mere beggars telling other beggars where to find bread" (Martin Luther). Humility motivates *discipleship*. Meeting someone on their gospel journey and remembering that you too were at that stage and that you are still on the journey yourself. Humility stimulates *service* (Acts 20:19; Romans 12:16).

- 2) Gentle. This is the same word that is translated "meekness" (KJV). Meekness is not weakness. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Think of a power saw: it can do some serious damage, but when it is channeled and guided, it does precise work. This word was used for a broken colt in the equine world (Bruce; cf. Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 109). Power trips are not becoming of the people of God. Meekness should characterize each and every member of a congregation.
- 3) Patient. This word literally means long-tempered (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 236) as opposed to short-tempered. It is also listed as a fruit of the Spirit. An antonym is irritability. Think of the work of clamps. They remain as they are for a long period of time, until the glue sets. It's "the ability to endure discomfort without fighting back" (Wiersbe, *Be Rich*, 96).
- 4) Forbearance. The notion of patience is explained with this word (Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 236); it's the practical outworking of patience (Foulkes, *Ephesians*, 109). It is the moment-by-moment, situation-by-situation manifestation of patience indicated by the present participle: "Be patient by means of forbearing" (cf. Larkin, *Ephesians*, 69). Think of an anvil. Though it is constantly pounded by the blows of

a hammer it keeps it shape, so when we are subjected to the blows of other's weaknesses and faults, we too maintain our composure.

Notice that the believers are eager to maintain this unity (cf. Colossians 3:14). The word "eager" means "to be especially conscientious in discharging an obligation" (BDAG, 939). It is often translated in the Pastoral Epistles with the phrase "make every effort" in the ESV (cf. 2 Timothy 2:15; 4:9, 21; Titus 3:12). To take some phrases from the sports world, it means to "leave it all on the field" or "to give 110%." We are to maintain it, to "hold on to something so as not to give it up or lose it" (BDAG, 1002). We are the stewards of unity, like a curator of a museum who maintains its collections.

"The bond of peace." The word "bond" was used of the fastenings that held various ships together (cf. BDAG, 966). I'm no woodworker but I've built a few toys for my kids. Not long ago, I built a truck for Sammy. He asked for a boat too. So I pieced together a boat for him. I tacked the pieces of wood together with small nails to maintain the unity of the piece. After I did this, I wrapped it up with blue tape so it would look like our blue boat. Before I put the tape around it, it was unified by a little rickety, but after I bonded it with the tape it was much stronger and more durable. Wood glue has the same strengthening effect. The unity that is mentioned here is strengthened by the bond of peace.

Peace is not merely the cessation of hostile activity but the establishment of a personal relationship with the God of the universe. Moreover, horizontal peace (peace with others) is possible because of vertical peace (peace with God) (cf. 2:15-16). If you have not been born again, you are still at war with God. Every sin you commit is a moral hand grenade you launch at God.

These four unifying qualities are powerful but if we're honest, we do not always manifest these in our relationships. We have a choice to make now. First, which of these qualities are lacking in us? We need to tend the garden of our inner person, as it were. The weed of pride wants to choke out the blossom of humility. The weed of power trips wants to eradicate the life from the flower of meekness. The weed of irritability wants to do away with the plant of patience. The weed of a critical spirit wants to stifle the growth of the tree of forbearance. Is the root of love present, giving life to these Christian graces? In short, to use Solomon's metaphor the little foxes will spoil the vine of unity if we do not eagerly safeguard it. The greatest invitation I extend to you is the invitation to find peace with God in Jesus Christ.