

The Body of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Unity of the Spirit

Ephesians 4:1-6

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine at the center is the unity of the church: its ground, its nature, and its maintenance. Paul teaches that unity is not something the church manufactures but something the Spirit has given, which the church must diligently keep (v. 3). He grounds it in seven objective realities (vv. 4-6), culminating in the one God and Father. The crucial doctrinal point is that the oneness of the church flows from the oneness of God Himself: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, therefore one body. This is the foundation for everything our study has said about the undenominational church Christ built. Division is not a minor flaw; it contradicts the very nature of the God who is one.

Two emphases deserve doctrinal care. First, the unity Paul commands is unity in truth, not unity at the expense of truth. The same seven-fold list names one faith and one baptism; biblical unity is unity in the one faith and the one baptism, not a vague tolerance that treats all doctrines and all baptisms as equal. So when you reach the heavy doctrinal block (Q9), connect the oneness of God to the oneness of His church, and address denominational division honestly: a divided Christendom with many faiths and many baptisms is not the unity Christ prayed for or the Spirit gave. Second, this unity is to be pursued with humility and love, not arrogance. Holding the truth and bearing with one another belong together; we contend for the one faith with the gentleness and patience of verse 2.

The formational aim is intensely practical, because Paul makes it so. He does not first give us theology and then application; he leads with the lowly virtues that actually hold a church together: humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearing love. Most division in a faithful congregation does not come from doctrine but from pride, impatience, and unforgiveness in ordinary relationships. Your aim is to help each student see unity as their personal responsibility, to identify the relationships where they are failing to bear with others, and to take a concrete step toward peace. Move them from being passive about unity, or quietly contributing to division, to being eager to maintain it.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul urges the church to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called” (v. 1), and the first mark of that worthy walk is unity. Why does Paul make unity the leading evidence of a life worthy of the gospel, and what does that tell us about how seriously God takes division?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's "therefore" turns from the doctrine of chapters 1 through 3 to the life that fits it. A worthy walk is one that matches the calling. And the first evidence Paul names of such a walk is not zeal or knowledge but unity.

Stress the significance of this ordering. Of all the marks of a worthy Christian life Paul could have led with, he leads with keeping unity. This reveals how central unity is to the gospel and how seriously God takes its opposite, division.

Connect to the prayer of Jesus in John 17. Christ prayed that His people would be one so that the world would believe. The unity of the church is bound up with the credibility of the gospel before a watching world.

Apply it soberly. If unity is the leading mark of a worthy walk, then division, factions, and broken relationships in the church are not small matters. They contradict the calling itself.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unity as the leading mark of a walk worthy of the gospel.
- The seriousness with which God regards division.
- Jesus' prayer for unity tied to the world's believing (John 17).
- Broken relationships in the church as a contradiction of our calling.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul lead with unity as the mark of a worthy walk?
- How does the unity of the church affect its witness to the world?
- What does this say about how seriously we should take division?

Question 2

Student Question:

Paul says a worthy walk begins with "all humility and gentleness, with patience" (v. 2). Which of these, humility, gentleness, or patience, is hardest for you in your relationships with other Christians, and where is that lack most likely to damage unity?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question takes the virtues of verse 2 into honest self-examination: humility, gentleness, patience. Paul lists the very graces that make unity possible, and their absence is what breaks it.

Help students see how each guards unity. Humility refuses to insist on its own importance; gentleness handles others with care; patience endures the slowness and faults of others. Where one is missing, friction follows.

Encourage honest naming of the weak point. Most of us know which of these we lack. The proud struggle to defer; the harsh wound with words; the impatient give up on people too quickly.

Aim for one relationship where the missing virtue most needs to grow, and a concrete way to practice it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Humility, gentleness, and patience as the graces that guard unity.
- How the absence of each breaks relationships.
- Honest self-knowledge about one's weak point.
- Practicing the needed virtue in a specific relationship.

Discussion Prompts

- Which of the three is hardest for you, and why?
- Where is that lack most likely to damage unity?
- How could you practice the missing virtue this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says to maintain unity “with patience, bearing with one another in love” (v. 2). What does it mean to “bear with” one another, and why is this patient forbearance, rather than mere agreement, the actual fabric of unity in a real church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul's phrase “bearing with one another in love” (v. 2) names the actual fabric of unity. To bear with is to put up with, to endure, to make allowance for the faults and differences of others.

Stress that unity is not the same as agreement or sameness. A church is full of people who differ and who will, at times, annoy and disappoint one another. Unity holds not because the friction disappears but because love bears with it.

Correct a common misunderstanding. Some imagine unity means everyone becomes alike or agrees on everything. Paul knows better. Unity is the love that keeps fellowship through difference, the patient forbearance that does not let friction become fracture.

Ground forbearance in the gospel. We bear with one another because God in Christ has borne with us (Colossians 3:13). Our forbearance is a small echo of His great patience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Bearing with one another as the fabric of real unity.

- Unity as love through difference, not sameness or full agreement.
- Forbearance that keeps friction from becoming fracture.
- God's patience with us as the ground of our patience.

Discussion Prompts

- What does it actually mean to bear with one another?
- Why is forbearance, not mere agreement, the fabric of unity?
- How does God's patience with us shape how we bear with others?

Question 4

Student Question:

Paul calls for bearing with one another "in love." Think of a specific person in the body who is hard for you to bear with. What would it look like, this week, to bear with that person in love rather than in irritation or avoidance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question makes forbearance concrete by attaching it to a specific person. Paul says bear with one another "in love," and love is not abstract; it acts toward real people.

Help students move from the general to the particular. It is easy to affirm forbearance in principle and fail at it with the actual person who tests us. Naming the person is the start of loving them.

Distinguish bearing with in love from two counterfeits: irritation that simmers, and avoidance that withdraws. Both keep the peace falsely. Forbearing love stays engaged and kind.

Aim for one concrete act toward that person this week: a kind word, a renewed engagement, a refusal to let irritation rule, a choice to make allowance for them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forbearing love directed at a specific, difficult person.
- The counterfeits of simmering irritation and quiet avoidance.
- Staying engaged and kind rather than withdrawing.
- A concrete act of love toward the one who tests us.

Discussion Prompts

- Who is hard for you to bear with in the body?
- Are you more tempted to irritation or to avoidance with them?
- What would bearing with them in love look like this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul commands believers to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (v. 3). Why does Paul say maintain rather than create, and what difference does it make that unity is a gift of the Spirit to be guarded rather than a human achievement to be manufactured?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul says be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit” (v. 3). Two words matter: maintain and of the Spirit. Unity is not created by us; it is given by the Spirit and kept by us.

Explain the significance of maintain. We do not build unity from scratch by negotiation or programs. The Spirit has already made us one body. Our task is to guard and preserve what God has given, not to manufacture it.

Explain the significance of of the Spirit. The unity is the Spirit’s work, accomplished by joining us into one body in Christ (Ephesians 2:13–18). This means division is not merely a relational failure; it tears at the Spirit’s own work.

Apply the word eager. Maintaining unity is not passive. It calls for diligence, effort, initiative. Peace does not keep itself; it must be pursued (Romans 14:19). The eager believer takes responsibility for the unity of the body.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Unity as the Spirit’s gift, to be maintained, not manufactured.
- Division as an assault on the Spirit’s own work.
- Maintaining versus creating unity.
- Eager diligence and initiative for peace.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul say maintain rather than create unity?
- What difference does it make that unity is the Spirit’s gift?
- What does eagerness for unity require that passivity does not?

Question 6**Student Question:**

Paul calls us to be eager, diligent, to make every effort for unity. Honestly, how eager are you for the unity of your congregation? Where have you been passive about peace, or even a quiet contributor to division, and what would eagerness for unity require of you?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question presses the word “eager” into personal responsibility. Paul expects active diligence for unity, yet many of us are merely passive, and some quietly feed division.

Help students examine their actual contribution to the peace of the body. Passivity looks harmless but leaves unity untended. Worse, gossip, complaining, taking sides, and nursing grudges actively corrode it.

Name the quiet forms of division: the critical word, the cold shoulder, the alliance against another, the refusal to reconcile. Eagerness for unity means refusing these and pursuing peace instead.

Aim for a concrete shift from passive or divisive to eager: a habit of speech to lay down, a peace to pursue, an initiative to take for the unity of the congregation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Active responsibility for the unity of the congregation.
- Passivity that leaves unity untended.
- Quiet forms of division: gossip, sides, grudges, coldness.
- Pursuing peace as a deliberate, eager effort.

Discussion Prompts

- How eager are you, honestly, for the unity of your congregation?
- Where have you been passive about peace, or fed division?
- What would eagerness for unity require of you this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul anchors unity in seven realities: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (vv. 4–6). Walk through these seven. Why does Paul ground the church’s unity in these objective truths rather than in shared preferences or feelings?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question opens the seven-fold foundation (vv. 4–6). Walk through each: one body (the one church), one Spirit (who indwells and unites it), one hope (the shared destiny), one Lord (Jesus Christ), one faith (the one gospel and body of truth), one baptism (the one entrance into Christ), one God and Father (over all and in all).

Stress that these are objective realities, not feelings or preferences. Paul does not ground unity in shared personality, taste, or sentiment, which shift and divide. He grounds it in unchanging truths about God and His salvation.

Show how the list builds to its climax: one God and Father of all. The unity of the church is ultimately rooted in the unity of God. Because God is one, His people are one.

Apply it to how we pursue unity. Since unity rests on these truths, the way to deepen unity is to return together to them: the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism. Unity grows as we are gathered around what is objectively true, not as we paper over differences.

Note that one faith and one baptism are in the list. Biblical unity is unity in the one faith and the one baptism, not a tolerance that treats all faiths and baptisms as equal. This sets up the heavier block to follow.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The seven objective grounds of unity (Ephesians 4:4–6).
- Unity rooted in unchanging truth, not shifting preference.
- The unity of the church flowing from the unity of God.
- One faith and one baptism as part of the foundation.
- Deepening unity by returning to shared truth.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul ground unity in objective truths rather than feelings?
- How does the list build toward the one God and Father?
- How does returning to these shared truths deepen real unity?

Question 8

Student Question:

Paul says there is one hope to which we were called. When the differences and frictions of church life feel overwhelming, how does remembering the one hope you share with every other Christian, the same destiny, the same inheritance, change the way you relate to them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self question lifts the discouraged or frustrated believer to the one hope. When church relationships are hard, the shared destiny reframes everything.

Help students feel the weight of one hope. Every Christian they struggle with is headed for the same glory, will share the same inheritance, will stand together before the same Lord. The differences that loom large now are small against that horizon.

Apply it to patience. We can bear with people far more readily when we remember we are bound to them forever. These are not temporary companions but eternal family.

Aim for a concrete reframing: choosing to see a difficult brother or sister in light of the shared hope, and letting that change one interaction this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The one shared hope as a reframe for present friction.
- Eternal destiny shrinking temporary differences.
- Patience grounded in being bound together forever.
- Seeing difficult members in light of the shared inheritance.

Discussion Prompts

- How does the one hope change how you see a difficult brother or sister?
- Why do present differences shrink against the shared destiny?
- How could the one hope change one interaction this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul declares there is “one body” because there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father” (vv. 4–6). What does this God-centered foundation say about denominational division and the idea that many competing churches with different faiths and baptisms are all equally pleasing to God? How does the oneness of the Lord require the oneness of His church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block. Paul’s logic is inescapable: there is one body because there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (vv. 4–6). The oneness of God requires the oneness of His church.

Draw out the argument. If there is only one Lord, He cannot be the head of many competing and contradictory churches. If there is one faith, then the many conflicting faiths of a divided Christendom cannot all be that one faith. If there is one baptism, then the church cannot be at peace with many different baptisms taught for many different purposes.

Address denominational division honestly and without rancor. The present state of a divided Christendom, with hundreds of bodies holding different doctrines and practices, is not the unity Christ prayed for (John 17) or the Spirit gave (v. 3). It cannot be the case that all of these, teaching contradictory things, are equally pleasing to God. Truth is one because God is one.

Point to the remedy, consistent with our whole study. The answer to division is not to declare all divisions acceptable, nor to attack people, but to return to the one foundation: the one Lord, the one faith once delivered, the one baptism, the one undenominational church Christ built (Romans 16:16). Unity is found by all coming back to the same revealed truth.

Hold truth and love together. We say these things not to win arguments or to despise others, but because we long for the unity Jesus prayed for, and because we love people enough to call everyone back to the one body. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), which is the very next movement of the chapter.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One body required by one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God.
- The impossibility of contradictory faiths all being the one faith.
- Denominational division as contrary to Christ's prayer and the Spirit's gift.
- The remedy: return to the one foundation, the undenominational church.
- Truth and love held together (Ephesians 4:15).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the oneness of God require the oneness of His church?
- What does this say about many competing churches with different faiths and baptisms?
- How do we call others back to the one body in love rather than in arrogance?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Ephesians 4:1–6. Having seen that the Spirit has given a unity you are called to keep with humble, patient love, name one specific way Jesus is calling you to guard the unity of His body, and what is the first step?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the capstone, turning the chapter toward a personal step. The lesson has shown unity as the Spirit's gift, grounded in the one God, to be kept with humble and patient love.

Press for a concrete action in keeping with the lesson's emphasis on relationships. For most students the step will be relational: a reconciliation to pursue, a grudge to release, a habit of speech to lay down, a person to bear with in love.

For some, the step may be doctrinal and missional: a renewed commitment to the one body and the one faith, or a longing and effort toward the unity Christ prayed for.

Close by holding truth and love together. To guard the unity of the Spirit is to love both the truth and the people, refusing both compromise and division. Invite the student to take one concrete step in that direction.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Guarding the unity of the Spirit as personal responsibility.

- A concrete relational step: reconciliation, forbearance, peace.
- Renewed commitment to the one body and one faith.
- Holding truth and love together.

Discussion Prompts

- What is one specific way Jesus is calling you to guard the unity of His body?
- Is your step relational, doctrinal, or both?
- What is the first step, and when will you take it?