

The Body of Christ

Lesson 6: The Unity of the Spirit -- Ephesians 4:1-6

Anyone who has ever shared a kitchen with other people knows that unity is harder than it looks. Two people who genuinely love each other can come to the edge of war over how to load a dishwasher. The closer we live to one another, the more our differences rub. And the church is people living close, people of different ages and backgrounds and temperaments and opinions, all trying to share one life. If you have ever wondered why church relationships can be so hard, this is why. Real unity among real people is costly work.

Paul knew this, and he does something important in Ephesians 4. He had spent three chapters describing the soaring heights of God's grace, how Christ tore down the wall between Jew and Gentile and made the two into one new humanity. Now he turns the corner: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." And the very first thing he asks of them is not doctrine or evangelism or service. It is to keep the unity God has already given.

Notice that word, keep. Paul does not tell us to create unity or manufacture it. He tells us to keep "the unity of the Spirit." Unity is not a human achievement we build from scratch; it is a gift the Spirit has already made by joining us into one body. Our job is to guard it, to maintain it, to refuse to tear apart what God has joined together. And Paul tells us exactly how that is done: with humility, gentleness, patience, and love that bears with one another.

Then Paul lifts our eyes to see why this matters so much. He lists seven great ones: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Our unity is not based on personality or preference. It rests on these unshakable realities. There is only one body because there is only one Lord. To work for the unity of the church is to live in line with the way things actually are. This lesson is about that calling: to keep, with humble and patient love, the precious unity the Spirit has given.

Group Discussion: We have all seen relationships and groups divide, sometimes over big things, often over small ones. In your experience, what are the most common things that fracture unity among people who are supposed to be on the same side, and which of those creep into churches?

Personal Reflection: Think about your own relationships in the church right now. Is there anyone you are quietly at odds with, avoiding, or holding a grudge against? What would it cost you to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit" with that person?

Read Ephesians 4:1-6

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: John 17:20–23, Jesus' prayer that His people may be one, that the world may believe; Philippians 2:1–4, count others more significant than yourselves; Colossians 3:12–14, bear with one another and forgive, putting on love; 1 Corinthians 1:10, that there be no divisions among you; Romans 14:19, pursue what makes for peace and mutual upbuilding.