

The Portrait of the Church: Unity

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 April 2015

Preacher: Don Coleman

[0 : 00] Take your Bibles and if you've got a copy of it here and open your Bible to Ephesians.

I don't know why I've got my little marker in Philippians. I know why because that's where I was this morning. Although the passage of scripture I used for the funeral I've got memorized, but I just had it marked in my Bible anyway.

Anyway, Ephesians chapter 4 is where we are and starting a new chapter. We spent a long time looking at the latter part of Ephesians chapter 3.

I'm not sure just how many weeks. Of course, we did have kind of a hiatus from it for a number of weeks, but we're done with that. We're ready to start with chapter 4. I want to go ahead and read the first part of the chapter, that part of the chapter that will pertain to our subject tonight, though we'll not finish all of it tonight.

Let me read verses 1 through 16 of Ephesians chapter 4. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

[1 : 20] By the way, make note here that Paul considered himself a prisoner of the Lord. He was in a prison, but the Lord was his prison keeper.

And that's the best kind of prison keeper to have. So he's a prisoner of the Lord. And so he says, With all lowliness and gentleness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep 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 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 to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore he says, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

Now this, he ascended, this is kind of a parenthesis here in verse 9. This, he ascended, what does it mean but that he also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things. And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.

[3 : 18] But speaking the truth in love may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body joined and knitted together by what every joint supplies according to the effective working by which every part does its share causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

Now we're going to stop right there and we're not going to get that far tonight. Right?

But we'll wait until next week to do that. And so don't want to try to cram too much in this one night. So we'll make it about halfway through that passage and then we'll get the rest of it next time. Now I want to remind you of something that I know that I have said a number of times.

I know in kind of the introduction to the letter we covered this, but it's here at the beginning of chapter 4 that Paul makes a shift in his emphasis.

[4 : 52] He shifts from a doctrinal emphasis to a more practical emphasis. I mentioned that as we kind of, as I introduced the book and kind of gave you kind of an outline, kind of a division within the letter, doctrinal now to practical.

But let's not make too much of that. All right? It's not quite packaged that neatly. We should not assume, what I mean is we should not assume that nothing Paul has written thus far is practical.

He's given us some very practical things in the first three chapters. And by the same token, we should not expect the rest of this letter to be void of anything doctrinal.

He's not going to stop that. In fact, it's impossible really to go anywhere in Scripture where you do not have both doctrine and the practical side by side together.

And, you know, Lewis Barry Schaefer, I'll just kind of pull a quote out of the past. Lewis Barry Schaefer was founder and first president of Dallas Theological Seminary.

[6 : 09] And he wisely said this. He said, doctrine and duty, that would be the practical, doctrine and duty are related as tree and fruit. Now think about that, what that means.

And then also realize that a good many churches today need to take that wise counsel, that wisdom. There can be no fruit without the tree, right?

And in the same way, there can be no practical without the doctrinal. So these churches that say, you know, doctrine is not important. In fact, I know I've told this before, but years ago, several years ago, I'm not sure if I would characterize it as a privilege.

But I had the opportunity to teach January Bible study, and it happened to be 1 and 2 Timothy. I don't know how you teach 1 and 2 Timothy in a week. But anyway, I had the privilege of teaching that in Wyoming to a church.

And I know I've told this story before, but this church was just, you know, infected with the worst kind of charismatic type of theology.

[7 : 23] And one of the guys right at the beginning said, you know, we need to get doctrine out of the church because it divides the church and destroys the church. Doctrine is not important, he said.

You can imagine my blood pressure went up quite a bit after he said that, and I kind of set him straight.

I'm not sure that I really set him straight, but I certainly told him. But anyway, you can't have the practical without doctrine. And you can't teach God's Word without teaching doctrine.

We can't even define ourselves without doctrine. And so these churches, like the one that I mentioned, I think I alluded to it Sunday morning, a particular website for this church that said, if doctrine's important to you, then this is not your church.

It's not the right church. And I'm thinking, how can they even call themselves a church if they're not interested in doctrine? Doctrine is supremely important. And we can't teach practical things to God's people without it being mixed with doctrine.

[8 : 31] Just like you can't have fruit without a tree, you can't have the practical, the duty, the practical living things without teaching doctrine. And so I want to make sure I'm not misunderstood.

Chapters 1 through 3 are decidedly doctrinal. Doctrinal. Yeah, that's the emphasis. And now chapters 4 through 6 are decidedly practical.

That is the emphasis. The emphasis is there. But that doesn't mean there's not going to be any more doctrine. Because certainly we're going to be talking about some doctrine. All right.

But there is a shift in emphasis. And the clue is the word therefore. You know, therefore is a pretty key word to note when you're studying God's word. And so right at the beginning, verse 1 of chapter 4, we have therefore or I therefore.

And so now you know there is going to be a shift. We might think of it in this way. Chapters 1 to 3 reveal what God in sovereign grace can do and has done for all believers.

[9 : 38] Chapters 4 through 6 then present some of the demands that that sovereign God has placed upon his people. Demands upon those who have experienced his measureless grace.

And so that's how we could divide the book. But now let's narrow the scope a little bit as we kind of enter into our study tonight. The purpose of chapter 4 really runs from chapter 4 verse 1 all the way to chapter 5 and verse 21.

The purpose there is to provide a portrait for the church. Or a portrait of the church rather. That's the theme. Portrait of the church.

And these verses then that we're going to be looking at tonight and really for the next several Wednesday nights. These verses deal with the new standards God has given to his new society. And we often kind of call it this is a new thing, a new group of people, a new society. We know it by the church. Now what are these standards? Well, there are two.

[10 : 46] These standards are, first of all, unity. Or we could call it oneness. Well, that's what Paul called it, by the way. And the other one is purity.

So unity and purity. Oneness or holiness. And that's what Paul is going to be talking about for the next chapter and a half.

And we're going to take several Wednesdays to look at it. So tonight we want to start by looking at what Paul wrote about unity. Unity. The unity or oneness of Christ's church.

And we find that in the first 16 verses. The verses that I read a moment ago. First of all, we have the exhortation to unity.

Paul doesn't really put this in a form of a strict command. But he is exhorting us. It's the exhortation to unity within the body.

[11:44] Within the church. Verse 1, he says, I therefore, prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.

This is his exhortation. Now, the word walk, I don't really think I need to comment on that. Most of us have been part of church life long enough and have been under the teaching of God's word.

We already know what this word walk means. It means, it refers to the living of one's life, right? In fact, it is a strictly, grammatically speaking, it's a Hebraism.

This word walk. It just simply means to live. To live.

Beseech. Some of you have different translations, and so you don't have besiege. That kind of comes straight out of the old English, old King's English. But the word besiege, you might have the word implore in your version of the Bible.

[13:13] Maybe urge is another one. It means implore, urge, beg even. I think I even found one version of the Bible, English version of the Bible, had the word beg.

That comes from a Greek word, the Greek word that means to call. That's the root word here, kaleo. But the word here is a, it's a compound word.

Where Paul combines this word kaleo, which means to call, combines it with a preposition, para, or meaning beside or alongside.

And so you put that together, to call alongside. That's the meaning of the word. Similar form of this word is used as a name for the Holy Spirit.

In fact, a number of places, well, about three places specifically, all very close together in John. John 14, verse 26, for example.

[14:16] But the helper, the helper, some, I think the King James says, comforter. And in most English translations, translations, it's capitalized.

And so we know this is a name, it's a reference to God. God, the Holy Spirit. He says, but the helper, the word is perikletos.

I know that sounds a little bit different than perikleto, but it's just the form, the grammatical form of it.

Same word, perikletos. And he says, it's the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name.

He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. So, similar word. And that's important to note. Because you see, what Paul's doing is calling all of us to walk alongside of Him.

That's what he means by the word besiege. That's why I say that this is not so much technically a command as it is an exhortation.

[15:15] Come join me, alongside of me in this, to live for Christ. Perikleto. I beseech you, come alongside with me.

And when you consider that that word is also used in several places to reference the Holy Spirit, then we can come to this conclusion that we're only able to walk this particular walk because of the helper with a capital H.

or the one called alongside of us, the Holy Spirit, the paraclete. Well, paracletos is actually the word.

The one called alongside of us. So, here we have Paul beseeching us, you know, come, come and join me in this thing. Walk alongside with me on this.

And then knowing that the Holy Spirit has come alongside of us in order to help us to walk that particular walk. So, here's the exhortation to unity. Number two, the prescription for unity.

[16:20] What I would call the prescription, he prescribes some things here. In fact, really, I think we could call these indispensables. That must be true in order for us to know this oneness, this unity within the body, within the church.

Verses 2 and 3, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Alright, so, Paul just kind of piles on a bunch of words, kind of stacks them up there for us. And, what he's doing is listing some of these indispensables.

He said, here's what I prescribe for unity. Each one of you, this should be, you should embrace these virtues. And really, that's what they are. There are five virtues that must and will always exist in a church that is unified.

A church that enjoys a spirit of unity. Alright, so let's just think about these five. First one is lowliness or humility.

[17 : 29] Probably would be a word that we would understand better than lowliness. Lowliness is kind of an antiquated word. Humility. Some versions use the word humility.

And what is that? It's a sense of personal unworthiness. A sense of personal unworthiness. And there are three things that help us, help give us this sense that I'd like for you to consider.

Number one, a correct self-knowledge. Now think about that a minute. A self-knowledge, a self-awareness of the truth about yourself.

Is that important? Certainly. self-knowledge, not to be deceived, self-deceived, deceived, but to have a correct self-knowledge, a knowledge of self, who you are, really are.

And we're talking about steps to give you this sense of humility, lowliness. Starts with a correct self-evaluation.

[18 : 39] Maybe we could use that word as well. A self-knowledge. Two, placing one's self-knowledge. So you have the correct self-knowledge. And then to place that self-knowledge alongside the knowledge of Christ.

The knowledge of Christ and the demands of His Word. Now how do we have this knowledge of Christ? Well, we get that from His Word. And not just a knowledge of who Jesus is in His person and in His purposes and so forth, but also to have a knowledge of what He demands of us.

I say, here's the idea. Here's who I am and I'm not deceived. I'm not trying to paint a picture that's not true.

I have a correct self-knowledge in myself. So then put that side by side with Christ that you know of Him and His Word and the demands of His Word.

And then third, a constant sense of one's creaturehood. Mortality.

[19 : 52] I mean, who are we? We're not God. We have been created. And we need to have a constant sense of our mortality and therefore our absolute dependence upon God.

These are three things that if we will embrace these things and understand these things, apply these things to our lives, a correct self-knowledge, placing that side by side with our knowledge of Christ and who Christ is and all of His perfection and glory, and in this sense, His humility.

And that we are utterly dependent upon Him. So, here's the first virtue that Paul is prescribing.

When unity in the church, unity in the church, this is an indispensable. Humility. Humility. Then virtue number two, gentleness. The old King's English is meekness.

Meekness. Meekness really has a different connotation for us than it did when the writers of the King James used that word.

[21 : 14] It means the absence of a spirit of resentment or revenge. You can see how these would contribute to unity within the body. You know, you don't have this spirit of resentment when you're wronged.

Or resentment when maybe you're left out. Resentment when maybe someone has ignored you and you're not given kudos when you think you deserve it.

You know, a spirit of resentment. And not only that, but even a spirit of revenge. You know, when someone has done you wrong. You know, said something ugly to you or about you.

You know, whatever. This is gentleness or meekness. And this virtue describes then, we could say, a willingness to endure wrong or suffering without retaliation.

Can you see how that would solve a lot of disunity problems in the church? A lot of problems that come up in the church and divisions and schisms and splits come about because someone got bent out of shape and they couldn't just let it go.

[22 : 36] And they had a spirit of resentment, even revenge. So they were talked about and so they talked about. And this is the opposite of what Paul prescribes for this oneness in the church.

Meekness. Now, I can't help but throw this in. Meekness is not weakness. It doesn't mean you can't stand for the truth.

You know, it doesn't mean somehow that you must always back down from your maybe a doctrinal position or right position. It's talking about the spirit in which you respond to those who disagree. It's not weakness. It's not, meekness is not timidity. That's why meekness is not the best kind of word for us in our day because meekness carries that connotation of some wimpy, timid type of person, you know, that you could just, they'd fall over for you.

It's not that at all. Meekness, as someone has said, is power under the control of God. self has died and God is in control.

[23 : 54] No matter what the situation, even tough situations, maybe you really have been treated wrongly within the body from another member of the body, Christ.

And so how are you going to handle that? Will you handle that with meekness or gentleness? Third, long suffering or patience would be a better word.

more contemporary word. And it's talking about the ability to be patient with others. You can see how all of these would contribute to peace within the body, unity within the body.

We need this virtue. Be patient with other people. You get impatient with other people? Some people.

Well, we all struggle with that. Number four, bearing with one another in love. This is very close akin to the long suffering.

[24 : 58] And the idea is that love dominates our relationship with others. I'm just talking about our relationship with others that we love. You know, that's easy, isn't it?

I mean, you have a good relationship, you love a certain person, then you have a tendency to get along with that. But we're talking about all others. You know, love always dominates our relationship with others within the body of Christ, even those that we get out of sorts with or get out of sorts with us.

Someone has wisely said, love does not suppress irritation. It outruns it. That make sense?

See, it's kind of the cart before the horse kind of thing. So, someone irritates us and we respond in love so it suppresses the irritation that's starting to well up in us.

Well, love can do that. But real love in this context goes out before. It outruns the irritation. That is, we love you.

[26 : 10] before we even have a chance to be irritated. That our natural response to those who might irritate us, our natural response is to love them.

These are some powerhouse virtues. You see now why Paul would use, very selectively use this word beseech, this come alongside and kind of reminding us of the Holy Spirit.

it's not possible to have these virtues or to practice these virtues apart from the Holy Spirit in control of our lives. All right, so bearing with one another in love.

Then there's a fifth one. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. peace. So, this is something very active, isn't it?

Well, all of these are active. All of these come about because we decide to. We're determined that we're going to respond in these ways.

[27 : 15] But this one's very active. Endeavoring. Actually, striving. Striving to maintain the unity given by the Spirit. And that's, by the way, what he means here.

This unity comes from the Holy Spirit. It comes from God. But you also notice there in that part of the passage, this endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

All that goes together. All that's important. Peace, you see, is not the goal. It is the bond. It is the bond. That is for the Christian community.

Peace is not merely the absence of turmoil. But it is a bond. A bond that keeps turmoil from ever developing.

It's a virtue. peace. Peace. And striving always for peace. Not just after the fact when turmoil begins.

[28 : 18] And then we want, you know, and at that point we have no other choice but to try to respond to be peacemakers. But the kind of peace that Paul is talking about is a peace that's on the front end of that.

A peace, a bond of peace. We have this bond, this mutual bond of peace as members of the church.

A bond of peace that keeps turmoil from ever developing. I didn't say these things were easy. This is what Paul is saying.

So this is the prescription. Third, the description of unity. The description, he describes it here in really quite amazing.

verses 4 through 6, there is one body and one spirit just as you were called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, the Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all.

[29 : 22] It almost sounds a little redundant, doesn't it? It's an amazing passage of scripture. And it's helpful, I think, to notice that these verses, Paul organizes these verses according to the three members of the Godhead, of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Now that's the order we normally would articulate it, but Paul reverses the order. And so, verse 4, the emphasis there, he's pointing to God, the Holy Spirit.

He's not, by the way, trying to convey the idea of three separate gods, just one God. But within the Godhead, there are three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

And what he's trying to do is have us understand that all members of the Godhead are involved in this oneness or unity within the body.

And he begins with the Holy Spirit. Verse 4, one body, meaning one body of believers. We're one body of believers, the church.

[30 : 44] Now, we can think of that in terms of the local church, and that is how we ought to think of it in this time. the church is identified, defined by a local body.

We can talk all day about universal church, but that's a nebulous kind of thought in our day because God's work is through the local church. Now, one day when all this is over, and one day when we all get to glory, there will be a universal church, one church.

One church. But either way you want to think of it, the local church or a universal church, it is one body, one body of believers.

And how did we become this one body of believers through the work of the Holy Spirit? One Spirit. And here he's talking about the Holy Spirit.

It's capitalized, rightfully so, in most versions of the Bible. One Spirit, that is one Holy Spirit who is the regenerator. We could be saved apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

[32 : 03] Therefore, we would not be a part of this body, apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. He's the regenerator and unifier of the body.

Remember, this unity, this oneness is the author of that is the Holy Spirit. That's where he is involved here. And then one hope.

So, one body, one spirit, one hope of your calling. Calling to what? To salvation. Not just salvation, because it doesn't end there.

In fact, we need to understand salvation in a much fuller sense. it's one hope of your calling to salvation, but also to Christ's likeness as we grow and mature, becoming more like Christ, and also glory.

And glory, all of which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit. So, verse 4, is God the Holy Spirit describing this unity. And then God the Son is verse 5.

[33 : 10] One Lord, one faith, one baptism. One Lord, who is that? Jesus. Christ Jesus, who is our Savior and absolute Master of our lives.

One Lord. We have one Lord, and it's Jesus Christ. One faith. One faith. Now, that's not one faith in Him.

It's one faith in the sense of the faith. which is a term that encompasses all of the truth of Scripture. One body of doctrinal truth, we could say.

It's the faith once delivered to the saints, Jude, verse 3. One Lord, one faith, one baptism. And this is, I believe, a reference to water baptism.

By which, of course, believers publicly confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Really, the implication, verse 4, is the spirit baptism.

[34 : 23] We're baptized in one spirit. That's the spirit baptism. That's our salvation. But in verse 5, the idea is our water baptism, which is a symbol of that spirit baptism.

One baptism. One baptism by which we publicly confess Jesus as Savior and Lord. And then God the Father, verse 6. So we started with God the Son and kind of reversed the natural order, normal order that we think of the Trinity.

Started with the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, God the Holy Spirit, God the Son, and then God the Father, verse 6. One God and Father of all. One God and Father of all who in His Son have been given the

right to become children of God to those who believe in His name.

So He's not talking about the fatherhood of all mankind here. He's talking about one God and Father of all believers, all of the redeemed. We're in His family.

He is above all, that speaks of His sovereignty. And through all, that's a reference to His omnipotence, and in you all.

[35 : 52] That speaks of His omnipresence. Because He created you, loved you, saved you, fathered you, controlled you, sustained you, filled you, blessed you, and that's just part of the list.

Really. What a description of this unity. He used God Himself and all of His persons as the model, the illustration, the description of unity.

And really, it is because of the work of the Spirit, Father, Son, and Spirit, because of the work, their combined work in our lives, that we can even have you.

Alright, so the exhortation, the unity, prescription, the description, and there's one more, and we're going to save it for next time, because we get into some pretty interesting stuff there, what I would call the expression of unity.

The expression of unity, and that's where we'll get into the spiritual gifts that God has given to the church. Thank you.