

Ephesians 4:1-6 Unity in the Church

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[0 : 00] Isn't it good just to gather around and sing songs of worship to Christ together, knowing that we will be with him one day, he will be with us and that will just be a joy.

For the benefit of our guests, my name is Dove Cohn. I'm a pastor here at Providence and I have the absolute privilege to open up God's word for us this morning. Today, like I mentioned in the announcements, we're going to be talking about the beauty of unity.

Beauty of unity, we're looking at Ephesians 4, 1 through 6. If you want to open up your Bibles or scroll on your phones, Ephesians 4, 1 through 6. That's what we're going to be looking at today. And the main idea for the message today is that Christians are called to zealously maintain the church's unity.

Now, beauty can very much be in the eye of the beholder. Beauty can very much be in the eye of the beholder.

Some people see beauty in a golden sunset. Some people see beauty in a sparkling diamond ring. Me? I see beauty in a clean, ferocious slam dunk.

[1 : 23] Child with me here. I grew up in the Philadelphia area and you would think I would root for the Sixers. I root for the Sixers now, but back in the day I rooted for the Chicago Bulls and Michael Jordan. And I remember watching them as they ascended in the NBA to become the touchstone of greatness.

In the early to mid-90s, towards the late 90s, they were still really, really good. And I idolized Michael Jordan. I had the shirt, I had the shoes.

If you remember the chalk line jacket with his picture on the back, I had that. I love Michael Jordan. My bedroom wall had a poster that looked like this.

Where Jordan is just jumping, launching himself, you know, 15 feet from the foul line, dunking the ball cleanly into the basket.

And just consider how Jordan engaged and united. Every pound of muscle, every inch of flesh, every strand of nerve in his body to launch himself 15 feet and dunk the ball.

[2 : 33] Just breathtaking. Today, we're going to be talking about a unity even more beautiful than a Michael Jordan slam dunk.

We're going to be talking about a unity within the church. Within our church. Now, unfortunately, this topic might be hard for some of us.

Maybe you've been sinning against. Intentionally or unintentionally. Maybe someone's hurt you. Well, we're going to address that today. As we turn the page in our series in Ephesians, we've been talking about, you know, Ephesians 1 through 3, which is really the glorious truce of the gospel.

Today, we're going to turn the page from those glorious truce to applying the gospel, to gospel-driven virtue. We're going to be examining a short section of Scripture, just about six verses.

But these six verses are going to pack a punch. We're going to see the urgency of the call for unity within our church. We're going to see how we can zealously maintain and pursue unity.

[3 : 48] We're going to see the basis for this unity. And we're going to apply this exegesis highly practically. I'm going to give you really very practical things that you can do so that we can really maintain and protect the unity of our church for the glory of God.

And I feel strong conviction about this passage, about this topic, and I pray that I would transfer this conviction to all of you, that we would all feel more and more deeply and live out more and more deeply the unity that Christ bought for us on the cross and in his resurrection for our church.

So let's read the passage, pray, and let's jump in. Ephesians 4, 1 through 6. I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to the 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.

God, would you bless the preaching of your word. Amen. All right, let's begin our discussion this morning by talking about the context of Ephesians 4, 1 through 6.

[5 : 31] Let's look at the context. And the context is a very logical place to start for this passage because this passage starts with the word therefore. It starts with the word therefore. And many of you have probably heard this before, but any time you see the word therefore in a section of Scripture, it's a clue.

It's a clue to look back. Because what we're going to talk about now is highly connected to and really derives from what we've been talking about before. So therefore is really key.

And especially this therefore, in this passage, this is a real turning point in the letter of Ephesians. We've seen glorious truths up to this point, have we not?

We've seen what you would call indicatives. The indicatives of the letter of Ephesians. Ephesians so far has been statements of fact. Indicatives are who God is and what he has done and what he is doing and what he will do.

They're statements of fact. Now we're shifting in this letter to the imperatives of the letter. The imperatives of the letter or the commands.

[6 : 40] And before we examine these imperatives though, let's review what we've heard so far in this letter. Let's review the indicatives. We've heard some breathtaking blessings that God has graced the Ephesian church with and truly all of us as Christians.

So let me rehearse them for us. First, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world.

God chose us to be holy and blameless before him. He predestined us to be adopted as sons and daughters of God. He's brought us back from sin and judgment through Christ's blood.

He's forgiven us our trespasses, the blessings. The blessings just go on and on. Now second, in Ephesians 2, we saw these blessings are all grace.

Are all grace. And grace for ill-deserving sinners. Truly, we are not just undeserving, but we are truly, we were ill-deserving rebels against the high and holy King of Heaven.

[7 : 59] We were dead in our trespasses and sins. We once followed the prince of the power of the air. We all once followed Satan. We once lived out the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, opposed to God.

Truly, we were children of wrath. But God, God, being rich in mercy, made us alive together with Christ.

He saved us by his grace. He destined us to experience the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. And he's made us his own workmanship.

He's made us his own project, which he's crafting and molding and shaping and refining so that we can do good works, which he prepared for us ahead of time.

Third, we've seen this grace is for both Jew and Gentile. that God's made one people from these two.

[9 :11] And the Gentiles, who were far off, have now been brought near by the blood of Christ to God. That Christ has become our peace and made Jews and Gentiles into one new man.

Freaking song, us both to God in one body, no longer any hostility between the two. So those are the indicatives of Ephesians.

Those are the truths we've examined and relished in over the past few weeks as we've been studying Ephesians 1 to 3. Now we're going to take a turn. Now we're going to take a shift in the letter with this therefore.

And we're going to move on from what God has done and what God will do to the imperatives, to how we are called to live out in light of those truths. We're going to talk about gospel-driven virtue.

Gospel-driven virtue. Now this cannot be a more dramatic shift. Let's look at the language here in Ephesians 4.1. First, Paul references that he is a prisoner for the Lord.

[10 :22] And Chris talked about this a little bit a couple weeks ago on our snow day. That Paul was a prisoner for the Lord. This language of prisoner for the Lord isn't meant to underline and highlight and bold the fact that we are to listen to Paul at this time.

Paul is a prisoner for the Lord, literally in the chains of prison for his witness of Christ. And this isn't the only place in the epistles where Paul references his imprisonments and his sufferings in general to get the attention of his audience.

He is looking to get their attention, to grab their eyes, their ears, as they're listening to the letter. So look at 2 Corinthians 6, 3-5. Paul writes, we put no obstacle in anyone's way so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labor, sleepless nights, hunger.

And where other people might be ashamed. We'll talk about how they got in trouble with the world. Paul uses his troubles, his trials, as his qualifications, truly as his resume.

You know, think about it. Think about resumes. What are they used for? They're used for gaining credibility, for gaining an opportunity, for getting someone to hear what you have to say, giving you an opportunity.

[11 :53] Paul, instead of boasting of his academic or professional or other resumes might have like athletic accomplishments, Paul uses his sufferings as his resume, as his way of gaining credibility, of gaining the Ephesian church's ear and the opportunity to shepherd them and steward them.

Paul is saying, I have suffered this much for the gospel. Therefore, listen to me. Listen to me.

And not only does Paul stress his sufferings for the gospel to get the Ephesians' ear, but he uses vivid, potent language to get their attention. Notice in 4.1, Paul uses the word urge.

He urges the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. In the Greek, that's the word parakalo. Parakalo, which means to implore, to fervently beseech, or to exhort.

And to implore, beseech, or exhort in a gospel-driven manner rather than in a law-driven manner. It makes me think about when I'm out with my kids and we're going somewhere and I say, hey guys, we're Coens.

[13 :22] We show up excited and grateful and respectful. That's how we show up. That's how I'm calling you to show up.

Paul's doing something similar. Paul is saying, guys, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. Guys, our sins are forgiven. We're sons and daughters of God.

Therefore, show up like this. He's not saying act like this or else. It's not law-driven. It's gospel-driven virtue.

All right. So Paul the prisoner, Paul the sufferer for Christ, he's urging us corporately, corporately, to live in a certain way. So how is Paul calling us to live?

In one word. United. United. Paul is calling us to live in unity. And what's really helpful is that Paul gives some real definition to what living in unity looks like.

[14:28] Let's dive into that. What does unity look like? Two general categories. Humility and patience. Humility and patience.

Humbly and patiently. And I want to look at each one closely because each one is really a precious jewel in the crown of Christian virtue. Let's dive into each one.

So first, we're to walk humbly. Check out verses one and two. therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

So with all humility and gentleness. All right, so what is humility and gentleness? Well, a number of other meaningful, really meaningful, helpful scriptures help us unpack, especially the word humility.

So let's look at those. Let's look at Philippians 2. Consider Philippians 2. Humility is counting others more significant than yourselves and looking out for others' interests.

[15:35] humility is seeing others' contributions as large, even larger than your own. Humility is generous with giving credit. Humility is looking out for others as Christ looked out for us by giving himself for us.

And in our case, applying humility is praying for people, sharing with each other scripture that can bless us and strengthen us, or look for ways that we can serve people practically.

That's Philippians 2. Then think of John 13, where Jesus washes the disciples' feet. Think about that. Jesus, the King of Heaven, washes the disciples' feet.

No act of service was beneath our humble king. And no act of service is beneath us as we apply humility.

we can all take on any act of service to serve others for the glory of God. All right.

[16:44] Then Psalm 25, 9 says, He leads the humble in what is right and teaches the humble his way. Humility is being a learner, listening to the Lord and listening to other people, considering their opinion, being open-minded to others.

Yeah, humility does speak and does assert oneself, but humility is also very open to listening and learning from others. So humility, it's counting others more significant than yourselves, it's being willing to serve in high and low places, and it's being a learner and listening to others.

All right. And not only does God call us to be humble, but also to be gentle with one another out of humility. And one commentator put it that gentleness is really humility in action.

Gentleness is humility in action. And we've been well taught on gentleness in the past. Chris has taught us well that gentleness is using the least amount of force necessary to accomplish a relational goal.

I'll say it again. Gentleness is the least amount of force necessary to accomplish a relational goal. It's showing courtesy to one another.

[18:02] Biblical gentleness corrects without humiliating, confronts without content, and persuades but without coercion.

Corrects without humiliating, confronts without contempt, persuades without coercion. Biblical gentleness is beautiful and truly essential for us maintaining unity and honoring the Lord.

Now, Paul calls us not just to humility and gentleness, but also to patience and forbearance. Look at verses one and two again. I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you've been called with all humility and gentleness with patience, bearing with one another in love.

And patience, bearing with one another in love. We're literally to be called, or we were literally called to be long-suffering with one another.

We're to be kind to each other when sinned against, or if you notice sin in someone else. Guys, what does patience and forbearance presuppose?

[19 : 25] It presupposes that we're going to sin against one another, and we're going to notice sin in other people. And how should we respond when we are sinned against or offended?

Patiently. Patiently, bearing with one another in love. As verse 3 puts it, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

That doesn't mean, that doesn't mean that we don't speak the truth to each other. We speak to the truth to each other in love. It doesn't mean that we don't have theological backbone, but it means that we hold our doctrinal convictions in love for the good of our brothers and sisters in Christ and for the glory of God.

And it doesn't mean that we break fellowships with one another flippantly or consumeristically, but rather we are thoughtful and long-suffering and desirous to see all of us, each one of us, thrive in the Lord.

As Paul writes elsewhere in a very familiar but beautiful passage, love is patient and kind. Love does not envy or boast.

[20 : 44] It is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things.

Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Church family, we must, Paul urges us, to bear with one another in love.

Let's walk in a manner worthy of our calling. Let's walk in a manner of love. Let's be humble and gentle, patient and forbearing. Let's be eager to maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace.

Let's live united. Now, consider the opposite of this. Consider the disease lupus.

With lupus, the body's immune system literally, mistakenly attacks its own tissues and organs. I've known a few people with this disease.

[21 : 53] I don't know if any of you have. But it is fatiguing. It is painful. It is destructive. And it's not how the body was designed to function.

Instead, the church is to function with gospel-driven virtue. Consider Colossians 3. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has been played against another, forgiving each other.

And pay attention here. Here's gospel-driven virtue. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. That is gospel-driven virtue.

That's our faith. Christ has forgiven us. Christ bears with us. Christ is compassionate towards us.

May we be united and bearing with one another, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. So the question is, why?

[23:04] Why are we to live in unity and why is it such an urgent call? Why does Paul devote these six verses to calling the Ephesian church and our church by extension into unity?

We'll look at verses 4-6. This is our doctrinal foundation that supports this call. Ephesians 4, 4-6. There is one body and one spirit just as you were called to the 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. Notice how many times Paul uses the word one in this passage.

One body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. The Christian life is a united life, a united faith, because God is a united God.

Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad. Here Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

[24:20] As God is one, we are to be one. To divide what God is united is not just relational failure, it's theological inconsistency.

And as you imagine, Jesus says it best in John 13. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. All right. So, that's the doctrinal background.

That's the doctrinal backbone of the call to live in unity humbly, gently, patiently, and with forbearance. Let's apply it now. Let's apply it now.

And let me cause you potentially, potentially some good convicting pain with some questions. Is there anyone in this church community that you're not currently living in unity with?

[25:27] In action? In word? In attitude? In your heart? Are you bearing any grudges against anyone in your heart?

Do you have any ill feelings for anyone in your heart or even displayed outwardly? I'll say another way. Is your heart full of affection for everyone in this church?

Or are you restraining your affection in any way? If so, well then this passage invites repentance.

Repentance always leads to freedom. So this is true for you in any way. In any way. To any degree. I want us to think and I want us to go deep for a second.

Are you still amazed at the grace of God toward you? Are you still amazed at the fact that Christ died for you?

[26:32] Are you still blown away at the fact that your name is written in the book of life? Remember the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18?

The one who owed a tremendous debt and was forgiven a tremendous debt. Well you have been forgiven. I, all of us have been forgiven a tremendous overwhelming debt of sin.

God paid a weighty massive suffocating burden of sin for us. He's lifted it off of us so we could be forgiven and we could be reconciled to God and reconciled to each other.

I like to suggest and Jesus has my back here that if you are struggling to be humble and gentle patient and forbearing with a brother or a sister or a spouse or a child then you're struggling to live in the overwhelming generous grace of God.

Friends as a step as a first step to living in unity let's remember God's grace towards us. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to us former traitors to God.

[28:03] Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places to people to us who used to follow Satan. Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places because of Christ's life and death and resurrection.

Every move Christ made every choice he took every righteous deed he accomplished for 33 years was to provide all of us with righteousness and every bead of sweat on his brow every pang of pain from every thorn he fell was so that we could be forgiven.

just consider his love his humility his gentleness his forbearance his compassion and tell me can you hold a grudge outwardly or even just in your thoughts or your heart against anyone else when we consider God's grace towards us our heart should melt our hearts should melt so if you have if your conscience convicted you in any way as I've been talking just consider consider confessing any kind of bitterness or unforgiveness or even lack of affection and love confess it to the Lord receive his forgiveness and then go to a brother or sister and apologize and ask him to forgive you and restore fellowship shed a tear hug it out do what you need to do but eagerly maintain the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace well we've seen a lot in the short passage from Ephesians 4 1-6 to wrap things up today

I want us to remember a few things let's remember the glorious truths of our calling in Christ the blessings the predestination the adoption the redemption the forgiveness let's remember the glorious truths of his grace towards former ill-deserving sinners let's remember God's kindness to us to unite Jew and Gentile into one new man united brought together and let's remember God's call on our lives the gospel driven call to live in unity to live humbly and gently with patience and forbearance towards one another eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace most of all let's remember that when Christ that when the gospel that when grace drives our hearts we are living by gospel driven virtue we can overcome all sin against us and we can love one another just beautiful more beautiful than a sunrise more beautiful than a sparkling diamond ring even more beautiful than a clean ferocious slam dunk the unity of the church is meant to be just breathtaking and I pray as we go forward as we walk out our calling together as a church we be filled with increasing love and affection for one another and that when that's lacking if you are sinned against or you notice sin in someone else that we can first and foremost remember

Christ's love towards us and forgive or ask forgiveness and we can live united all for his glory and our joy for Christians are called to zealously maintain the church's unity let's pray dear God we praise you because you are a united God we praise you because you are good and your steadfast love endures forever thank you thank you that our names are written in the book of life because Jesus because you gave yourself for us thank you that you brought us together in love and in unity please help us to walk out that unity to maintain and pursue that unity that you bought for your glory and for all of our joy in Jesus name we pray amen