

Unity

We start our study in Eph. 4 where Paul calls the Church into unity.

Eph. 4 ¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Vs. 1. I, therefore.

1. These are based on what Paul has been as an example of his ministry.
2. The prisoner of the Lord. He was a prisoner because he was a servant of the Lord.
3. Walk worthy of the calling. They had been called to a glorious calling. The Christian has been called to the highest calling with which man has ever been honored, being a servant of Christ in His ministry.

Vs. 2.

1. Walk in humility and gentleness of spirit, patience, bearing with one another. These are characteristics of walking worthily.
2. If the heart is filled with love, the other qualities will be shown forth, worthy of the walk.

Vs. 3.

1. Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit.
 - a. The characteristics in verse 2 are essential to unity and peace. The unity of those who have the same Spirit, not merely an outward unity but inward also. An outward unity, which does not always secure peace or unity – chain gang
 - b. Paul knows the history of his audience – Jew versus Gentile. This history had been broken
 - i. This harmony was a product of the holy spirit.
 - c. The nature of that unity which Paul prescribes: it is the unity of the Spirit,
 - d. At the seat of Christianity unity is in the heart:
 - e. This unity of heart our hearts is imperative for us to have as the Church
 - f. This we should Endeavour to unity and peace.
 - g. We must do our utmost to keep unity.
 - h. If others will quarrel with us, we must take all possible care not to quarrel with them.
 - i. If others will despise and hate us, we must not despise and hate them.
 - j. We should never let this Spirit produced unity slip away.
 - i. If we do, we will walk in an unworthy manner
2. In the bond of peace.
 - a. Peace is a bond, as it unites persons, and makes them live in friendly united one with another.
 - b. A peaceable disposition and conduct bind Christians together,
 - c. Where discord and quarrelling disband and disunite their hearts and affections.

- i. Many slender twigs, bound together, become strong.
 - 1. As in a bundle of rods, they may be of different lengths and different strength; but, when they are tied together by one bond, they are stronger than any, even than the thickest and strongest was of itself.
- 3. We must have proper motives to promote Christian unity.
- 4. Paul urges us to have unity; There should be one heart; for there is one body, and one spirit,

Eph. 4:4-6, ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you also were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Vs. 4-6.

- 1. There is one body.

SB – Why is one body important to the work of the Church

- 2. The Unity commanded has a basis in seven unities which existed in the church, and should exist in all ages.
- 3. Paul is writing that there is unity in each one of seven essential features of Christianity, and hence all should seek to "keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

This passage, could divide the elements of church unity into three categories:

- (1) The church itself constituted as a unity: One Body, one Spirit, one Hope.
- (2) The means by which this united church is built up: One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.
- (3) Over all one Supreme Ruler, one God and Father of all.

So, we have a united working of the church.

Paul expresses the concept of Christian unity within the Church in this passage. The Old Testament gives us a picture of what this looks like.

Nehemiah was a Jewish leader who helped supervise the rebuilding of Jerusalem in around 516 BC.

He worked with the prophet Ezra to rebuild the spiritual foundation of Israel after being taken into captivity in 886 BC.

He had permission to rebuild from King Artaxerxes but the people had been gone for 70 years.

Others had moved into Jerusalem when the Jewish people had been taken into captivity and this group of people caused trouble for Israel.

Nehemiah 3:1-32 – The Value of Unity, Teamwork, and Encouragement

Read: Nehemiah 2:11-17 and 3:1-5

- 1. Nehemiah 3 is an account of how the wall of Jerusalem was rebuilt.

- a. In fact, that is basically how the entirety of the chapter is laid out.
 - b. This family rebuilt the wall from here to here and beside them these people were there and so on and so forth.
 - c. This is a good example of the repetition that is present in many Old Testament passages.
- 2. Though this does not make for gripping and compelling reading it does show the attention that the Jews of this time had to detail and gives us some good lessons for our lives today.
 - a. This passage teaches a lot about unity, teamwork, and encouragement. Let's touch on four lessons we can learn from this passage

1) Burdens are Lighter when Everyone Works Together.

- 1. One of the amazing accomplishments that occurs in the book of Nehemiah is the fact that it only took the people 52 days to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 6:15).
 - a. Now granted there were still lots of things to be done after this but what an amazing feat that was able to be done.
 - b. This was accomplished because everyone was working together. One thing chapter 3 of Nehemiah shows us is the sheer amount of people that were working on the wall.
 - c. What also reminds us of is the immensity of the work at hand.
 - d. Jerusalem was not a small village but a large city covering a substantial area.
 - i. The length of the walls is 4,018 meters (2.4966 mi), their average height is 12 meters (39.37 feet) and the average thickness is 2.5 meters (8.2 feet). The walls contain 34 watchtowers and seven main gates open for traffic, with two minor gates reopened by archaeologists.
 - e. It is only by every one of those people working diligently together that the work got done.
 - f. This shows the principle that working together lightens the burden of the work God has for us.
- 2. This is most clearly seen in the church environment when so much of the work that the church does relies upon everyone doing their part.
 - a. Take, for example, a very common event at a church, vacation Bible school.
 - b. Each one is a huge undertaking ministering to children every summer
 - c. The way in which these events happen is through the church working together and everyone doing their part to make these Bible schools successful.
 - d. The burden is lightened by all those that help.
- 3. Here's something for us to seriously ponder. Study after study shows that about 90% of the work done in a church is done by only about 10% of the people in the church.
 - a. This is true across the board from small congregations to mega churches.
 - b. What could the church accomplish with 100% of the church working for the cause of Christ and the Glory of God?

- c. Think of the evangelistic outreach, the discipleship opportunities, and vast work that could be done if the church as a whole would come together to accomplish the tasks laid out by Jesus.
- 4. SB - Here's three questions we can all ask ourselves in consideration of this.
 - a. Am I a burden to the work God is trying to do around me or am I making the burden lighter?
 - b. If a study was done at my Church, would I be counted in the 10% that does most of the work or in the 90% that only account for 10%?
 - c. Which group would I like to be remembered as being part of?

2) Work goes faster when everyone works together

1. Fifty-two days is an astonishing amount of time for the wall of Jerusalem to be rebuilt.
 - a. Now granted the people were not starting from scratch, they were rebuilding as opposed to building walls from the ground up, but still the description of the wall that Nehemiah received in chapter one was a pretty poor one (Nehemiah 1:3).
 - b. However, when people work together there is a speed that can be achieved that cannot be accomplished alone.
 - c. Think about the foundation built for this Church this past week, if one person had only done the work how long would it take to complete?
2. Work goes faster when everyone works together.
 - a. It is vividly shown in Nehemiah 3 and remains true when speaking of things done in ministry.
 - b. Not just speaking about how quickly chairs get put up after a church event but also the vitally important and eternally significant work that church is here to do.
 - c. How quickly can visitation, evangelism, ministering to the needs of others, and other such work be done when we all work together?
3. Let's face it the church has a lot of work to do but at the rate we are accomplishing it, that work might not ever get done.
 - a. It would go faster and be done better if we all stepped up and did the things that God by His Spirit has equipped us to do.
 - b. Let me remind you that the church of Jesus Christ is supposed to be a moving entity that not even the gates of hell can stand against.
 - c. However, if all of the church does not stand and take up the work each individual is called to the church will not have the momentum to knock on the door of hell let alone knock down its gates.
 - d. I do not write this to bring anyone down but rather to encourage us all that we can work together and we should be working for the Glory of God.
 - e. When we labor in unity for our Savior that work will go quickly and are wondrously beneficial to the entire world.
4. SB - Here are some questions to think about when it comes to the church and how quickly its work is being done.
 - a. Am I acting like grease or glue? Change is hard.
 - b. How can I help the work of the church and in turn help my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ do what needs to be done?

- c. What is my place in the church and am I where I need to be?

3) Each person's work is important

1. As you're reading Nehemiah 3 you probably have thought 'wow Jerusalem has a lot of gates.'
 - a. It's true Jerusalem did have a lot of gates back then, some less prestigious than others and let's face it most people could only name 2 or 3 if they really tried.
 - b. However, when you look at it from a construction and strategic standpoint there is no gate or wall that is more or less important.
 - c. There are eight gates and some might be more prestigious than others, I believe I would rather be working on the Fountain Gate than the Dung Gate, but all were important.
 - d. The fact of the matter is if every one of the gates and walls were rebuilt with the exception of one, Jerusalem would not be safe.
 - e. If one gate or one wall did not get rebuilt it would be open season on the inhabitant of Jerusalem because their defenses would be worthless in the presence of an unfinished piece of the wall.
2. The same is true of the work of the church and the work that we do in the service of God Almighty.
3. Sometimes the work we do might feel insignificant or trifle but there is a huge purpose in it and can have eternal consequences.
 - a. Right now, you might be feeling the same way with the seemingly small things you are doing for God.
 - b. It might feel like you're building the Dung Gate with no purpose but I assure you, you can never estimate what God is doing through your service to Him.
 - c. Every aspect of ministry is of untold value to the purposes of God.
4. Remember these things the next time you feel down and out because you think the work you do is small.
 - a. God uses small things to do great works
 - i. David and Goliath
 - ii. The lad in the Feeding of the 5,000
5. All things work together in God's great plan - Romans 8:28
 - a. ²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.
6. Every part of the Body of Christ is Important - 1 Corinthians 12:12-30
 - a. ¹³ For ^uby one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

¹⁴ For the body is not one member, but many. ¹⁵ If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason ^uany the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not *a part* of the body," it is not for this reason ^uany the less *a part* of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But now God

has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. ¹⁹ If they were all one member, where would the body be? ²⁰ But now there are many members, but one body. ²¹ And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, ^[m]it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; ²³ and those *members* of the body which we ^[n]deem less honorable, ^[o]on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, ²⁴ whereas our more presentable members have no need *of it*. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that *member* which lacked, ²⁵ so that there may be no ^[p]division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is ^[q]honored, all the members rejoice with it.

7. SB – Ask who is this kind of person in your Church
 - a. Are you someone who other see as working behind the scenes without recognition?

4) Each person is due recognition for his work

1. This final point is one that I make to those in leadership, those with children, and anyone in the position to praise another for the work that they do for the Lord.
 - a. In this life that we live for God we need encouragers.
 - b. Not ones that are inflating our egos but ones telling us good job and keep up the good work.
 - c. Nehemiah 3 stands as a record of who did the work but I bet it also encouraged all the men who were working on that wall knowing that their names were being written down.
 - d. I suspect they worked a little harder when they realized that when someone read the pages of the account of the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem that their names would be seen.
 - e. Let me urge you to encourage everyone you can when the work of God is being done.
 - i. Parents, build your children up and praise them for serving the Lord.
 - ii. Ministers, encourage and recognize those in your congregation that have worked diligently for the Lord.
 - iii. Be an encourager that the work of God might continue and that the servants of God might not lose heart.
2. Discouragement is a reality for those that would follow after Christ.
 - a. This world will relentlessly say that what we are doing is pointless and our efforts are futile in what we are trying to accomplish.
 - b. Discouragement is a reality in our world.
 - c. The sad fact that we need to take notice of is that an environment of encouragement and healthy encouragement is only present when Christians chose to act and make it happen and there is a great need for that today.

- d. The Church, the Christian home, and those places filled with Christians ought to be places where people's spirits are lifted up.
 - e. The only way a person should be able to leave church discouraged is by a sheer act of a stubborn will coupled with the intentional deafness to the uplifting and encouraging words of all the saints that are present and a chosen numbness to those trying to lift them and their spirits high.
3. Let me end talking about Nehemiah by giving some advice on being one who encourages and recognizes the work that people do for God.
- a. Be on the lookout for those that you can encourage, you'll be surprised how many people need a word of encouragement.
 - b. Regularly encourage those that are in the habit of serving God. Sunday school teachers, youth ministers, and Pastors especially
 - c. Notes written to acknowledge and encourage others are worth their weight in gold, silver, and platinum
 - d. Make complimenting and encouraging a thing you want to have no regrets about in life. A word of praise and acknowledgement could change someone's course of life. Don't be timid, just do it!

Restoring Relationships as a Part of Unity

- 1. SB - Why do we need to be concerned about restoring broken relationships?
 - a. People are the body of Christ and it is people that make up the Church
 - i. We need unity between each other
 - ii. Unity among the Church keeps satan out
- 2. What does the Bible say about our relationships with one another?
 - a. Unity is commanded that we live together:
 - i. In peace - Romans 12:18
 - 1. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.
 - ii. In One body - Romans 12:5
 - 1. So we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
 - iii. In Love for one another - 1 John 4:12
 - 1. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.
 - iv. In Unity - 1 Peter 3:8
 - 1. Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.
 - v. In Encouraging one another - 1 Thessalonians 5:11
 - 1. Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.
 - vi. It is a sin to hate your brother - 1John 4:20
 - 1. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.

3. To restore relationships, we need to restore our perspectives and processes to New Testament instruction.
 - a. All other sources will ultimately be futile.
4. SB - How does the Bible instruct us in restoring our relationships?
 - a. Philippians 4:2-3
 - b. I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. **3** Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.
 - i. Find a way to work out the issue
 1. Each woman is call to equally responsibility to work out differences
 2. Both had worked as helpers to Paul
 3. Command they live in harmony (to agree in the Lord)
 4. Others to help bring an end to the issue
 5. Paul recognizes that at times people need help in reconciling their differences
 - ii. Our take aways
 1. Got to work out differences between brothers and sisters
 2. Can't let differences get in the way of unity
 3. Other need to help work out differences
 - c. Matthew 5:21-26
 - d. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' **22** But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell. **23** "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, **24** leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. **25** "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. **26** Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.
 - i. Four different situations
 1. Don't be angry with a brother or sister for fear of judgment
 2. Don't call a sister or brother a fool – danger of hell
 3. Don't offer your gifts to God while a sister or brother has something against you
 - a. This can interfere with your relationship with God because of the sin involved
 4. Settle things quickly
 - a. Don't drag out Eph. 4:25-27
 - i. ²⁵ Therefore, ridding yourselves of falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE OF YOU WITH HIS NEIGHBOR,

because we are parts of one another. ²⁶ BE ANGRY, AND *YET* DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not give the devil an opportunity

- ii. Don't sleep if possible before getting resolution
- b. The longer it goes the harder it is to bring back unity
- c. Don't let the issue escalate
- e. Matthew 18:15-17
- f. "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. **16** But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. **17** If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.
 - i. Steps to resolve a conflict
 - 1. Talk to one on one first
 - 2. Then take 2-3 other with you
 - 3. Then take to the Church
- g. Matthew 18:21-22
- h. Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" **22** Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times.
 - i. SB – What does this passage say about forgiving our brother and sisters in Christ
 - ii. You have to forgive
 - iii. No limit on the number of times you forgive them
- i. Romans 12:9-21
- j. Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10** Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. **11** Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. **14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. **15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. **16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. **17** Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. **18** If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. **19** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." **20** To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." **21** Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
 - i. Show honor to one another
 - ii. Bless those who persecute you
 - 1. Do not curse them
 - iii. Live in harmony with one another

- iv. Repay no evil for evil
 - 1. Do what is honorable
- v. Live peaceably
- vi. Never avenge yourself
 - 1. Leave revenge to God
- vii. Instead of avenging:
 - 1. Feed your enemy
 - 2. Give drink to your enemy
 - 3. This will heap burning coals on his head
- viii. Do not be overcome by evil
 - 1. Overcome evil with good
- k. Colossians 3:12-15
 - 1. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15** And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.
 - i. All of these attributes are to be used in living with one another
 - ii. Love binds us in harmony
 - iii. Let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts
 - 1. Because we are called in one body
- m. Philippians 2:1-7
- n. So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, **2** complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. **3** Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. **4** Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. **5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.
 - i. All of these attributes are to be used in living with one another
 - ii. Do not have selfish ambition
 - iii. In humility count other above ourselves
 - iv. Look to the others interests not yours
 - v. Like Christ take on the form of a servant
- 5. So, we have seen what the Bible says about restoring relationships between Christians. Now let's see a simple plan for restoring relationships and encouraging unity.

7 biblical steps to restoring relationships - from Rick Warren (All scripture NASB)

1. Talk to God before talking to the person.

⁴ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is the source not your pleasures that wage war in your body's parts? ² You lust and do not have, *so* you commit murder. And you are envious and cannot obtain, *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. — James 4:1-2

2. Always take the initiative.

²³ Therefore, if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, ²⁴ leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. — Matthew 5:23-24

3. Sympathize with their feelings.

⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal *interests*, but also for the *interests* of others. — Philippians 2:4

A person's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook an offense. — Proverbs 19:11

² Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to *his* edification. --- Romans 15:2

²⁹ Let no unwholesome word come out of your mouth, but if *there is* any good *word* for edification according to the need *of the moment*, *say that*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. — Ephesians 4:29

4. Confess your part of the conflict.

⁵ You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye! — Matthew 7:5

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. — 1 John 1:8

5. Attack the problem, not the person.

²¹ When my heart was embittered And I was pierced within, ²² Then I was stupid and ignorant; I was *like* an animal before You. — Psalm 73:21-22

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger. — Proverbs 15:1
The wise in heart will be called understanding, And sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. — Proverbs 16:21

6. Cooperate as much as possible.

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people. — Romans 12:18

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. — Matthew 5:9

7. Emphasize reconciliation, not resolution.

HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. — 1 Peter 3:11

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” — Matthew 5:9

³ For even Christ did not please Himself, but as it is written: “THE TAUNTS OF THOSE WHO TAUNT YOU HAVE FALLEN ON ME.”— Romans 15:3

In Closing

1. Paul in Ephesians instructs us to have unity. Working together for peace and unity, they go hand-in-hand. Knowing we have:
 - (1) The church itself constituted as a unity: One Body, one Spirit, one Hope.
 - (2) The means by which this united church is built up: One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism.
 - (3) Over all one Supreme Ruler, one God and Father of all.
2. Nehemiah 3 gives us a Biblical example of what unity looks like.
 - a. The wall around Jerusalem had to be built to protect the people of the city
 - b. Worked hard to rebuild in 52 days and even under adversity from the people inhabiting the country at the time trying to hinder the work.
 - i. They had to slow the work by half working on the wall and the other being guards to protect till the wall was completed. Nehemiah 4:21-22
3. Through Nehemiah we see four points:
 - a. Burdens are Lighter when Everyone Works Together.
 - b. Work goes faster when everyone works together
 - c. Each person’s work is important
 - d. Each person is due recognition for his work
4. SB – Why is this statement true: Unity is imperative within the Church here or at any Church in the world
 - a. Jesus needs us moving in the same united direction to get His work done.
5. Resolving conflict with one another is imperative within the Church
 - a. Live in peace and unity
 - b. Find a way to work out differences
 - c. Help those in conflict work out differences
 - d. Settle things quickly
 - e. Put others before you by having a servant’s heart
 - f. Scripture provides a plan for resolving conflicts and ensuring unity