

Church Unity: Its Ground and Its Nature, p.2

By Jeff Noblit

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Ephesians 4:4
Preached on: Sunday, October 8, 2017

Anchored in Truth Ministries

1915 Avalon Ave.
Muscle Shoals, AL 35661

Website: www.anchoredintruth.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/anchoredintruth

Grab your Bibles and let's go to the book of Ephesians, Ephesians 4. As you know, last Sunday we concluded preaching through the book of Amos. As I have said, we got through with Amos but I guarantee, Amos is not through with us. I hope those truths permeated down to the bone marrow and you will not get over it and you will walk in those truths as the days go by. John MacArthur I believe is one of the best pastoral theologians on earth today. His books are always worth reading. His study Bible is about the best there is, I think. John MacArthur said today in a very unique way is a day of discernment. You've got to be discerning about what looks right, what looks spiritual, what looks solid but it may not be, and Amos helps us with that a lot.

But anyway, on Sunday nights we've been going through Ephesians and so I began thinking about this Sunday with the Lord's Supper and the baptisms and I thought, "Wow, where I am in Ephesians right now is the perfect theme for this morning." So we will be a little more brief but we'll look at where we left off in Ephesians in Ephesians 4, and we'll read all of verses 1 through 6, review quickly, there is so much we could say, but then get on to new material as we are talking about unity in the body of Christ.

Verse 1, Ephesians 4. Paul writing says,

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, 3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you 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.

This thing of unity in the body is a greatly misunderstood thing because the unity is the work of God and far too often in our Baptist or evangelical churches, we try to muster up in our fallen nature, in the strength of our fallen flesh, how to get along with each other and that may work to a degree as far as getting along with folks go, but that's not what God calls unity and it's not the unity that glorifies him.

So we talked about, first of all, how we were one body. That's what the text says as Paul is writing to the church at Ephesus, and let me remind you again, when he gets to chapter 4, he gets down to his first direct practical exhortation and what's the very first thing he wants to hammer home to this local church? Unity. But then he describes how it is a radical unique unity, different than any other unity or camaraderie or oneness the world may know or understand. Get that. It's radically unique. Our unity is not like any other unity, if it is, it's not of God. It's wonderful that you can be unified on a football team or a civic organization or 1,001 things in culture, now those aren't wrong, but it's not the unity God has ordained for his church.

First of all, he says we are one body in the outline here, and when he says that we are one body, we are down in verse 4, he is not giving an exhortation, he's giving a declaration. He said, "This is not something we do, it's something we are." He said, "I want you to walk in what you are. You don't put this on, it's there, now live it out." It's an organic thing. We are a living organism. We talked about that, how we are different members of one body; we have different gifts, different functions, different roles, but we all function together in one purpose and in unity. God created us to be interdependent. We have to have one another. The kidneys must have the heart, and the heart must have the lungs, and all of those must have the central nervous system. All different organs but all function together in a unity. That's the way God has made every local church. We're not so much like marbles in a bag, we are more like chunks of chocolate in a double boiler melding in one to another.

Then he says we are one Spirit, and I reminded you that this is not talking about the human spirit. Sometimes, you know, man is made in the image of God and so there are special unique qualities to human beings and sometimes we see these amazing qualities: compassion and mercy and courage and bravery. We saw that in this massacre that happened in Las Vegas as so many individuals and particularly the first responders, showed amazing heroics and compassion and mercy. That's the human spirit but that's not what we're talking about here. It's not the human spirit and it's not the team spirit. You know, there is that feeling of unanimity when certain groups get together around certain goals or objectives and they feel unified in it. That's a good thing in the world but that's not what we have. What we have is a unity of God's Holy Spirit. We are more than just one in enthusiasm or even one in heart. It's greater than that. Our unity is of one outside of us who has put his Spirit inside of us. We have been invaded by a force from outer space and it has changed us, and all of us changed ones have been changed by the same Spirit, so when we get together and imperfectly now, yes, but rather when we are trying to walk in that Spirit, there comes about as a natural byproduct a beautiful special unity.

One body and one Spirit and I gave you these conclusions for practical application about maintaining unity in the body of Christ, you might say in a true church. First of all, we talked about it being positional and progressive. That is, in God's mind we are all already one positionally. That's our status, if you will. But being imperfect and being in this season of sanctification, we are also to be progressing and doing better at this. So hundreds of times a year within the body of Christ, we are forgiving, we are tolerating, we are overlooking, we are forbearing, we are letting a brother have his way or a sister

have her way and not ours. Why? Because the Spirit of God has changed us and we love the body more than we love ourselves and so there is a progression that is going on even though in God's mind his saved ones are unified and one already.

2. Corrective discipline is required. If a church willfully neglects biblical corrective church discipline, it cannot have God-wrought, God-ordained unity. Listen to me: once one person openly and willfully sins and keeps sinning without a humble repentant spirit, they are already a disunifier because they are grieving the Spirit who is the agent of unity. So rebellion against the Spirit's control is a disunity in itself. Then, of course, if you have an individual who is actively purposing to form a party or develop a faction within the church to go against church leadership when there is no good biblical reason to do so, I mean, before you would form a faction or a party to oppose your leadership, you had better have a boatload of clear doctrine that is being violated. That's not the way you handle that. If there's a problem that you have with anyone, you are always to go to them humbly, respectfully, and confidentially and work it out. Now, if someone starts denying the virgin birth or the inerrancy of Scripture or the vicarious atonement of Christ, something of that dimension, then I'll form a party. But unless it's something of that dimension, we don't function like that and, by the way, that's not been the spirit of this church in much more than an a decade and I thank God for that. But corrective church discipline is essential.

And by the way, why do you think God has ordained that in the public square and in all aspects of society but somehow we can leave it out of the church? Everything you are a part of in life that matters has accountability and discipline in it. That means you can't fly an airplane the way you want to fly it. You can't go where you want to go. You can't stop when... You have to be disciplined and accountable to people over you or we will have a total mess, and it's with all of our men and all of our ladies and all of your areas of responsibility. Anything that is important has accountability and discipline in it and so should God's local church. Always loving, always humble, always compassionate, but it must be there.

It's a great joy to me to be able to tell you and I mention this from time to time, I'm chasing a rabbit but it's a pretty good rabbit chase here. It's not too often but we occasionally have a person that is removed from membership because they will not stay faithful to their marriage vows and we have worked and worked and they are just not interested in trying. You hear about that and that is made aware and people know about that, but do you know what you don't know? You don't know the dozens and dozens and dozens of couples we meet with and pray with and they do repent and they do work on it and the marriage stays together and nobody needs to know they even had trouble. That's church discipline, folks. That's what you do. Lovingly and privately with humility and compassion, working with one another unless there is just a brazen hardness to not try and that lack of repentance has to be dealt with by the church.

Well, 3. not only view it as positional in God's eyes but we are progressing, not only must there be corrective discipline but, thirdly, guard against Satan, the author of disunity. The Bible speaks of Jesus used the parable of how Satan will sow tares among the wheat. He

works feverishly to infiltrate the church so that he might put some in the church who are of the carnal man or the natural man, who are not spiritual at all, and the only desire and appetite they have is for their own desires and own appetites, not God's desire or God's appetites for his body, and they are agents of disunity and Satan is behind it.

Then, 4. admit only true believers into membership. One of the things that has edified me as much as anything in being a pastor is to read church history, and I would go back a century, two, three, four, five centuries sometimes, and read some men who are reputable as godly and good pastors over those centuries, and I found that in the former centuries, our Baptist forefathers in particular were very careful and very thorough and quite slow about receiving members. As a matter of fact, a lot of our churches in Europe and in Asia are still that way. It's very common to go into a church in Europe or Asia that we would consider a sound or true church and find that they have 300 in attendance but only 120 members, and that used to be common in America, by the way. The reason for that was a lot of people would attend and a lot of people would come and they would want to hear the word and many of them would be converted, but coming into full membership was a slow process. And somehow 30, 40, 50, 70 years ago perhaps at the most, we turned that upside down and began on this rapidfire aggression to get all the numbers we possibly can. Now folks, when it comes to conversion of souls and sharing the Gospel and urging people to repent and be saved, let's go for all the numbers we can. Amen? That's why we still have a visitation program here, but when it comes to membership, you've got to be careful to only add to the church those the Lord is adding to the church; the ones he has acted on; the one he has brought to repentance; the one that he has given the gift of repentance and faith. They show the evidences.

Some of you will remember when you were children that in Baptist churches they would often have a person standing down front and the church family was given a chance to examinize, examine that person. I don't think examinize is a word, examine that person. You see, you've got to listen. There are little tidbits in here you need to get and I can create a word but I usually tell you if I am. They examine that person because they want to guard the body. Are you hearing me? And I think that's a little weighty because that's why you have church elders and leaders, they can do that in a more private setting. I think that's a little better. But we do do that here.

So now we come to new material and this is: one hope. What a powerful truth this is as he continues on in verse 4 and he says, "There is one body," Jesus is saving those who will be members of one body, that's why we must be unified. He said there is "one Spirit," verse 4 again, the Holy Spirit changes us and he lives in all of us, that's why we are unified. Then he makes this phrase, "just as also you were called in one hope of your calling." Now, the word "hope" here, this one hope we all share. You know, your hope is not different from your hope. And your hope is not different from your hope. And your hope is not different from your hope. It will have one hope. We share in the same hope. Now, the word "hope" here, as you well know, does not mean it may be so or I hope so, it means a certainty. It means there is something that is for sure though we do not yet hold it in our hands. It's not an uncertainty but a certainty. It's not a wistful dream that we don't really expect. You see, all believers have the same high destiny. It's the hope we have.

You could expand it out this way: we have believed on Jesus Christ, we see the evidence in our hearts of having sensed the weight of our sin and come to be a repenter of this sinfulness we see in us, and our faith, we are now repenters and faithers, we are now placing our faith in Christ and on him alone. And I do it every day. Every day I cast my heart toward him and say, "Oh Christ, you are my hope." We all share in that one hope. Every day we are repenters all day long and every day we are faithers all day long. Faith is not something you just did when you were seven in vacation Bible school, and repentance is not something you just did one time when you were 12. No, you began repenting and you began faithing. That's what the Bible means when it says, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord." It didn't mean a one time moment experience, it means you became a person who calls on him and his grace through Christ to be your only hope of salvation. You live in that ever-present heart condition of calling on him in his grace to be your only hope of salvation. Are you with me?

So in hope we have believed on Christ and we know we have justification. I don't feel all of it yet, I don't see all of it yet, but I know its standing is true. I am justified. In hope, I believe God is now progressively sanctifying me. That's part of the reason for the body of Christ. Together we have each other to sharpen, correct, reprove, encourage, love, lift up one another, so we can continue on in sanctification. That's part of our hope. Don't you hope God keeps helping you to get over your love for sin and love Jesus more? That's what I hope. I hope it for me, I hope it for you. I hope some of you would love the local church a little more. It would help me believe your conversion was more genuine.

Hope of justification. Hope of sanctification. And then, of course, that hope of ultimate glorification that one day we will see him and we will be just as he is and we will enter the eternal state never to leave again and enjoy the ever increasing unfathomable pleasures of God for all eternity. You think you're having fun down here, you don't know what pleasure is. You're a fool, a fool, if you think this world has the best pleasure. It's nothing but a sorry empty counterfeit of the deep, rich, glorious, wondrous pleasures we will have when we are glorified and with God forever. We all have that one hope. You see, if you are saved, when I preach that there should have been the germ in you that the Holy Spirit put a little spark to and that germ said, "Yes! Yes, I believe that."

So all believers have this one common hope, but he uses a phrase here, "you were called in one hope of your calling." Go back up to verse 1 of chapter 4, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." You know, God has a title for us that he really really really likes. Our President, I think he really likes being called the President of the United States. Well, God has got a title for us he really really, not two but three reallys, really likes: the called. It's interesting to me that in Christendom and in our modern age for sure, we never use that phrase. We use saved, born again, Christian, all good words, good titles for what we are, but God likes all of those, those are used in the Bible, but he seems to really like the word "called." The word "ekklesia" is the Greek word for "church." It occurs over 90 times in the New Testament. We are called the ekklesia. Do you know what the literal meaning of the word "ekklesia" in the original Greek is? "The called out ones." He says,

God says, "I have gone out into the world through the agency of my Gospel being preached and the Spirit using the Gospel and I am calling out my ones from all over the place, and I am calling them out from their primary identity being their marriage, their family, and certainly the world, I am calling them out from that being their primary entity to being identified with my other called out ones in what we call local churches." So every time you use the word "church" you are calling yourself "a called one." Over 90 times in the New Testament.

And just to show you how thoroughly God likes this phrase and I'll just have to run through this very quickly, listen to these verses.

Acts 15:17, time to get your fingers quick now. "So that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name." Now they are preaching about and discussing the fact that, "Uh-oh, Jesus is saying saving folks other than just Jews?" "Yes," the apostle says, "all of those who are called, who are his called ones are going to be saved."

1 Corinthians 1:24, "but to those who are the called," of any people, "both Jews and Greeks," he is "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

1 Corinthians 7:24, "Brethren, each one is to remain with God in that condition in which he was called." He didn't say in which he was saved. He could have, that would work, or which he was born again. What he's saying is the Corinthians wrongly thought that if you get converted to be right with God, you needed to immediately become a single person, and some of them were wanting to get divorced and be single and have total devotedness to God. And Paul said, "Whoa, whoa, time out. No, no. Whatever you were when you were saved, when you were called of God, stay right there for a little while and chill out." That's what he's saying. But the point I want to make: he gives us this title "the called."

1 Corinthians 1:9, "God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son."

Romans 1:6. I don't know if you have this one. You do have it. "Among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ."

Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are," saved, he could have used that, God likes a different one, "called according to His purpose."

Romans 8:30, "and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified." Now notice this, your justification begins the moment you believe on Jesus, your calling began before justification. The Bible is very thorough on this, is it not? It's just quite amazing.

Romans 9:24, "even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles."

Galatians 1:15, "But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased."

Galatians 1:6, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ."

Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful."

2 Thessalonians 2:14, "It was for this He called you through our gospel." Notice there he throws the human means in, the means that God has ordained to call his children is through the human Gospel, the Gospel being preached through which he calls men. You can't get away from this. If you are one of those who wants to cookie-cutter and organize your view of Christianity in a little box that fits in the logic of your fallen mind, you are way way off base. It's bigger than your brain. Aren't you glad you got in on it?

2 Timothy 1:9, "who has saved us and called us with a holy calling."

James 2:7, "Do they not blaspheme the fair name by which you have been called?" You were called by the name of Christ, that means the character, beauty, wisdom and power of Christ. He is the one that called you and saved you.

1 Peter 1:15, "but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves."

1 Peter 5:10, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory." Aren't you glad he didn't just call you to be saved down here, he called you to be saved all the way through to glory. If he called you to do that, you're going to do that.

2 Peter 1:3, "seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence."

Then Jude says, "Jude, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are the called." Now here he gives that specific title, you are the called. You could say the saved but he says the called.

Ephesians 4:1, "Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called." And there are some others.

What is my point? Getting back to this theme of unity, that Paul is writing as his first strong powerful exhortation of practical application for the Ephesian church, he says, "You've got to understand something, God did this therefore you are unified because God did it. If you did it, you could leak it. If you did it, you could lose it. If you performed it, it would be imperfect." So therefore, Grace Life Church of the Shoals or any local

church, if you are a predominantly regenerate membership, if most of you have truly been born again by the Spirit of God, God has called you to one thing and that is to Christ, to hope in him as one body. His calling makes you one together. You have to work at not being one if you have been truly saved.

Now, the calling here is what we call effectual calling. Again, the word "effectual" means it accomplishes the end for which it has set out to perform. God said, "I want them to be my children. I'm going to call them to be that," and it is effectual. Are you listening? Every single solitary one God calls in his effectual calling do come under conviction, they do come to repentance and be a repent, they do place their faith in Christ and become a faither, and they do have a new love for Christ and the things Christ loves, centrally so, his local church.

It's effectual. It achieves the purpose for which it has set out to perform. God doesn't sit in heaven and just send out a call, that he is sitting up there kind of wringing his hands saying, "I hope those sovereign individual human beings of mine will choose me. I hope all of those sovereign individual human beings would come to me." Now listen, in balance from the human side, we must have a responsibility, we must preach a responsibility that you are to repent and believe on Christ and if you do, God will save you, but so often the scriptures don't even give a hint of the human side because they want the church, the truly saved ones, to glory over the divine side because it's what's so awesome and glorious and great. It causes us to wonder over him. It causes us to marvel over him. We stay in balance but when the book gives us a heavy weighty treatise on the divine side, we deal with it heavily and weightily and that's what Paul is doing here.

So this speaks of effectual calling. Now there is a universal calling, as we might call it, where through nature, through the conscience, through the law of God as written in men's hearts, and through the voices of Christians and friends and family members and preachers, God's general call goes to all men in one form or fashion. God generally universally calls all men but here's the point, listen to this: not one single solitary soul who has ever lived on this planet has responded to the general or universal call of God. Not one. God puts his arms out wide in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, he calls to all to repent and all to come and all to find forgiveness, and not one of their own being and strength will do that. But every single one on which he acts with his effectual calling, which is what this text is talking about, do become humbled, do begin to see their sin, do begin to see their want and their depravity, and do see Christ and him alone as their only hope, and do become a faither and a repent.

Jesus reminds us in John 6:44, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day." Now the context of this verse is really heavy because he is being criticized by the religious leaders and spiritual men of his day for being out of whack, for being a fraud, for being an imposter, for not being a true teacher. And Jesus said, "You know, here's the problem you guys have, if my Father didn't call you, you're not going to come to me. It's not me, he hasn't acted on your hearts yet."

Matthew 11:25, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants." God seems to have a pattern of effectually calling those who are not the brightest or the most intellectual or the most gifted or the most promising. He just seems to have a pattern of calling those the world doesn't think are worth a whole lot. Not absolutely. There are those brilliant geniuses like Charles Haddon Spurgeon, though Spurgeon had great weaknesses of his bodily strength, he had lots of diseases and weaknesses that way, probably the ministry accelerated those, but he doesn't do that a lot.

I heard a preacher one day when he was dealing with this fact that God seems to call the common, the base, the low, the things the world would call foolish, he asked his congregation to raise their hands, "How many of you had a Ph.D.?" And some of them raised their hands and he said, "Well, God can save you, he just has more trouble doing it." A bad statement. A bad statement. God has no trouble saving whomever he wants to say. He doesn't have any trouble at all. The text says he just chooses not to. This is a God you bow before. This is a God you humble yourself before. And this is a God when he reveals his wisdom and his manner and his means of building his church, that you say, "Yes, Lord. Yes, Lord."

So we are called from this position of being in irreconciliation, being the enemies of God, into reconciliation. Then we are called to fellowship after that reconciliation. And as we live in this, this is our hope, that we have been reconciled and the fellowship has started and it's just going to get better and better until it is full and we are glorified in heaven one day, because the Spirit is the fuel, if you will, of this foretaste of glory. He is there and he gives us this hope. The Spirit of God is central to everything we'll talk about in unity.

Hopefully we are growing to become like the psalmist in Psalm 42:1 and 2, "As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God; When shall I come and appear before God?" Notice the heart hope, that I have him, I know him, but I want more of him. That's what brings us together. We are all these peculiar unique people that God has acted on, calling us. On the human side, we must repent and place faith in Christ, but if that has happened, the Bible makes you humble yourself and acknowledge the divine side caused all of that to come about. "Pastor, how does that work?" I don't know. I have no idea. All I know is we are commanded to go to all men everywhere and urge all men everywhere to repent and believe on Christ and God will save them. Amen?

So this little bit of water, we get this little spiritual refreshment down here that lets us know we are his and lets us know we are loved unconditionally and lets us know that he would never throw his away, but it's just a little taste. Like the psalmist said, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." And that's our hope that we've got a little taste but we are going to get a lot more.

I don't know why but when I was thinking about this, I thought about when I was in high school. Me and some of my buddies would haul hay in the summertime and they didn't have those big round bales, couldn't pick those up. We had the little square bales and we

would haul hay sometimes 12 and 14 hours a day. We hauled hay on 18 wheeler trucks. You would never think you're going to get the thing full. Hot July, August, dusty, dirty, and I remember thinking because there are lots of clear beautiful creeks and streams up in Lawrence County, Tennessee, I remember hauling that hay thinking, "If I could get in one of those deep cold pools of water on maybe one of those Sugar Creek or Factory Creek or Knob Creek, any of those creeks, if I could just go there, I just want to go to the bottom and open my mouth and drink right now. I just want to be swallowed up in the cold, crisp, refreshing water because it's so dry and dusty and hot and I'm tired." That's our spiritual hope. We get tired of this dry and dusty and weary world, but God has given us a little touch of refreshment and we all share that hope. It's just a little touch but one day we will have it in the full. All believers have this hope and only believers have this hope.