

The Unity God Calls Us to Preserve

Ephesians 4:4-6

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Introduction:

Last week, we came to chapter 4 in our study of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians.

- We have seen that Paul makes a transition at this point.
 - Up until now, he has been almost exclusively describing the grace that God has lavished upon all who believe...
 - but in chapter 4, he turns to call all of us who believe to live a life worthy of the grace we have received.
 - And he continues to describe what this new life in God's salvation entails until nearly the end of his letter.
 - Having been told what God has done for us, we are now told what we are to do.
- And in verse 2-3, he gives a summary of what this new life—this worthy walk entails.
 - He explains that it involves doing our part to preserve the unity that we have as those in whom God's salvation is being worked out...
 - we must walk in lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love.
 - This is not something that comes automatically, but something we must endeavour to do, or give diligence to do.
 - The many divisions in the church today bear sad testimony to the fact that unity is not automatic for us...
 - It is something we must labour to maintain.

But I say, if we are being called to work hard at maintaining the unity that God has given us,

- we need to know just what that unity is!
- Confusion about just what the unity that God wants us to preserve has been a major cause of serious error in the church...
 - And the only way for us to sort it all out and to know for sure what real unity according to God's will is, is by consulting God's Word—
 - And right here in Ephesians 4:4-6,
 - we are told what real Christian unity is based upon.

- There is so much wrong thinking out there that we need to be willing to renew our minds by what the Bible has to say about this.
- Other people often want us to preserve some other kind of unity...sometimes they will even be nasty in their insistence about it...
 - They will make passionate pleas about the oneness of the church and they will try to make you feel guilty for not following their schemes about what unity is...
 - but if they do not vie for the unity that God has given us, then they are in fact working against unity, regardless of what they may say...
 - and if you allow yourself to be influenced by them, then you are also working against the unity the Lord has called us to maintain.
- Let me give you a couple of specific examples of false unity:
 - For the United Church, unity is based on doctrinal indifferentism—
 - that is, it is based on the notion that it doesn't matter what anyone believes or does as long as we all accept each other.
 - This is so contrary to the teaching of the scripture—it is in fact just the opposite of what scripture teaches...
 - The scripture tells us *not* to receive those who bring false doctrine and to remove the wicked person from our midst.
 - Real unity is not just a matter of everyone getting along—it's a matter of everyone following the Lord.
 - Our unity is not to be with those who reject the Lord, but it is to be a unity founded in Him.
 - But we are so accustomed to hearing the mantra of the advocates of false unity that it almost seems wrong to follow the Bible in this matter.
 - Sadly, because this doctrine of false unity is so in line with the spirit of this age,
 - there are many churches and Christians who are supporting this view, not only in the United Church, but in many other churches as well.
 - Let's consider a second example, a more ancient error about unity:
 - the unity that the Roman Catholic Church has always demanded...
 - a unity in a single man, the Pope, who claims to be Christ's vicar on earth—
 - a stand-in for Jesus Christ Himself...an anti-Christ...one who sits in the place of Christ.

- This unity is a purely organisational unity, far far different than the spiritual and doctrinal unity we are called to have in Jesus Christ.
- Christ, not anti-Christ, is the One in whom we are to find our unity...
 - And Christ's government is through His word and sacraments that were given to the church by His apostles...
 - not through traditions in addition to and even contrary to God's Word that men have added, sometimes for the most base reasons (such as to raise funds for luxurious living).

Brothers and sisters, it is essential for you to understand the unity the Lord calls us to preserve lest you expend your labour for the wrong kind of unity and be found to work against God!

- And it is for this reason that I urge you to give attention to what the scripture before us today tells us about this unity.
 - You will find neither the mention of a pope or the mention of doctrinal indifference.
- As we begin to consider our text (Eph 4:4-6),
 - You will notice that the connection it has with verse 3 is a very close one:
 - After telling us that walking worthy involves "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,"
 - verse 4 begins: "There is one body"—and goes on to describe the oneness in several ways...
 - The translators have shown us the connection with verse 3 by supplying the words, "There is."
 - You can see that these words are in italics—indicating that they are not in the original...
 - And while I agree with the intent, I think the connection is brought out even more by omitting these words!
 - Then we have, starting in the middle of verse 3,
 - "endeavouring the keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit..." and so forth...
 - It shows most forcefully that the very thing we are to endeavour to preserve is "one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling..." and so forth.
 - The unity of the Spirit is not some undefined something, or something left for us to define however we thing best...
 - It is the oneness described right here in our text.

I want you to notice something else about our text before we zero in on the particulars.

- I want you to notice that each verse speaks of the unity we have with one another with respect to a different member of the Trinity...
 - Verse 4 is about the one Spirit who animates us... that is, the Holy Spirit
 - Verse 5 is about the one Lord who rules us... that is, the Son of God,
 - And verse 6 speaks of the one God and Father who works all things for us.

- We will look at each verse in sequence, that we may come to understand more fully the unity our Lord wants us to maintain in the Holy Spirit, the Son, and the Father.

I. First, our unity is found in that we have one Spirit animating us...

- Verse 4 says,
 - Eph 4:4: There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;

- A. This speaks of the most intimate unity that can be described!
 - What could be more closely united than a body?

 - 1. Paul has explained that the unity we have is that of a family, and that is a close sort of unity...
 - A family is tied together by many things—they have a federal unity, an economic unity, a social unity, and such...

 - But a body has an organic unity...
 - Each member is so tied to the other that they cannot be separated without being destroyed.
 - If an arm is cut off, it completely loses its purpose.

 - 2. A normal body shares one life so that all the parts are bound up together and move together according to one spirit.
 - a. The spirit of the body is the animating principle, the thing that invigorates it and causes it to act—the thing that gives it life.
 - As James says in his epistle, the body without the Spirit is dead.

 - b. So it is that when Paul says that we, who are among God's elect, are one body and one Spirit,
 - He is referring to the fact that we all share in a common life...
 - You will remember back in Ephesians 2,

- it says that we, who were dead in trespasses and sins, have been made alive—that God has made us alive.
 - I explained to you that a dead person is one who does not respond to his surroundings...
 - If you prick him with a needle, he doesn't say ouch...
 - If the house is burning down, he doesn't get up and run out.
 - If someone needs help, he is completely oblivious to it all.
 - In the same way, a spiritually dead person is one who does not respond to God who is there...
 - He has a Creator, but he does not worship him or give Him thanks...
 - His Creator has given him counsel, but he does not live by it...
 - His Creator is the Judge of all, but the spiritually dead person does not acknowledge Him...
 - If he was alive, he would tremble with fright before God until he found salvation—he would be desperate to find salvation!
 - His Creator has sent redemption, but the spiritually dead person is oblivious to it... he goes on his sin as if all is well.
 - When God's Spirit makes a person alive,
 - that person always turns to God for salvation.
- c. Paul's point in saying that we one body and one Spirit is that we, who belong to Christ, are all animated by one and the same Spirit—the Holy Spirit of God.
- Without Him, we would not have life in God's kingdom at all...
 - We would still be dead in our trespasses and sins...
 - But when we have been made alive, it is the same life that we share from the very same Spirit.
 - This ties us together the same way that your hand is tied together to your brain and to your heart and your feet...
 - We don't have the feet wanting to go one place and the hands wanting to go another—
 - the body always works as one... unless is it completely malfunctioning.
 - All the members are animated by one life-giving spirit, and that life-giving spirit is moving the body as one organism.

TRANS> Now this may lead you to ask a question...

B. If we have this one Spirit that is giving life to one body, how is it that we have so many divisions among us?

- That is a great question... and I will attempt to answer it...
- 1. First, let me show you what is at the root of the problem...
 - In Galatians and Romans, Paul admonishes us to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh, but he also acknowledges that there is a struggle going on within us between the flesh and the Spirit.
 - The Spirit is the author of that new life that is in us, but the flesh is what we were before the Spirit came—when we were dead in our sins...
 - When you are made alive in the Spirit, (you all know about this if you have been made alive),
 - there is a struggle that begins between the old and the new, between the Spirit and the flesh.
 - To illustrate this in the everyday scheme of things...
 - If someone wrongs you,
 - your first response is to take revenge instead of going to them to reconcile with them...
 - you will want to give them the cold shoulder or lash out at them in anger, or make some cutting remark—or perhaps go and gossip about them...
 - But if you walk in the Spirit, you will go to them to reconcile.

TRANS> Now from this, you can see what it is that hinders the unity of the Spirit...

2. If we are truly in Christ, we all have the same Spirit and He produces the same life in us all... and it is a life that brings us together as one...

- a. But inasmuch as each one of us is not walking in the Spirit, we deviate from the new life that is ours—
 - In Gal 5:19, Paul says:
 - Gal 5:19-21: Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like...
- b. The division, therefore, does not come from the One Spirit and from the new life that He gives to all who are in Christ...
 - It comes from us not living out that new life in the Spirit...

- It comes from the fact that we are yet only partially sanctified.
 - If we were all perfectly sanctified, there would be no division among us at all.
3. Now someone will say—or at least I hope you will say it...
- a. What then, can we do in order that we may be more fully sanctified so that we do not contribute to the disunity?
 - And I will say with the Apostle,
 - “Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.”
 - b. And you will say, “How do I walk in the Spirit?”
 - And I will say what the Apostle also says—you walk in the Spirit the same way you received Him...
 - by faith...
 - As soon as you identify the problem, you ask God to change you and you look to Him to work in you and renew you—it is His work.
 - And I tell you that when He is working in you,
 - you will give effort to walk in the Spirit—
 - to walk that new walk and to live that new life...
 - You will want to be fully animated by God’s Spirit—to be full of the new life that He gives you.
 - You will put to death the deeds of the flesh...
 - you will starve it out and destroy it so that you can be filled with the fullness of life in the Spirit.
 - c. Don’t you want this my brothers and sisters?
 - Aren’t you sick and tired of your selfishness and your pride and your whining and your deceitfulness and your covetousness and your ingratitude before the Lord?
 - Don’t you, who have tasted of the good things of the Spirit,
 - yearn to have the life of the Spirit pulsating through every fibre of your being?

C. And my brothers and sisters, the great thing is,

- God’s Spirit is going to complete His work in every one of us who truly have the new life that He gives...
1. That is another aspect of our unity that Paul speaks of in verse 4—

- that we share in a one hope of our calling.
- a. The hope is the hope that we will be like Jesus—that we will be holy and without blame before God in love!
 - Back in chapter 1, Paul told us that the Spirit is a down payment of the inheritance we are to receive—a pledge of more—much more—to come!
- b. That means that if the Spirit has turned you to follow our God and to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ...
 - and if He has turned your brothers and sisters around to follow God and to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ for their pardon...
 - He is going to bring us all to perfection in that new life...
 - We who are now only partially sanctified—only partially filled with the new life that the Spirit gives...
 - will be completely filled with that new life so that the flesh is completely destroyed.

TRANS> But let's get practical here...

2. How does knowing that God will bring you and your brothers and sisters to this perfect sanctification help you to maintain unity now?
 - How does it help you when they still rub you—
 - partly because you are not yet fully sanctified and partly because they are not yet fully sanctified?
 - a. It helps because it enables you to be more patient with them...
 - You know that because God is at work in them, they will not always be like they are...
 - You know that something is being done about their sin...
 - And you know that they want to change—to be more like Christ—even if they may not yet realise certain changes that need to be made.
 - You know that God is working on them just as He is working on you.
 - b. You will say,
 - “But what if my Christian brother does not seem to care about attaining that new life?”
 - Well, if that is the way it seems, you need to find out if it is true.
 - And if it is true and he admits it—if he tells you that he has no interest in being holy,

- then you need to point out to him that he is not yet converted and that if he does not repent, he will be condemned at the last day.
- You see, our unity is not with those who don't share this hope with us...
 - It is with those who, notwithstanding all our inconsistencies and imperfections,
 - have been given the same Spirit which Spirit produces in us deep yearnings to be holy...
 - and gives us assurance and promise that we will be holy...
 - and which Spirit begins to lead us in the pursuit of holiness.
 - If the Spirit is not there, then you don't have this unity with them and you need to start evangelising them.
 - You see, you don't just pretend to have unity with someone who does not have the Spirit.
- c. But when there is that common hope—and when you and your friend are conscious that you both share that common hope...
 - Then you begin to work together in the Spirit...
 - You begin to pray for each other and to encourage each other...
 - and to rebuke each other when necessary—and to appreciate your brother's rebuke.
 - There is a sweet unity as brothers who are moving along together as one body to reach the same goal...
 - The same Spirit is filling all of your fellow believers with new life, and it is both exciting and encouraging to move along together toward the goal!
 - That is what we do when we are one body and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Now I want you to see...

II. Secondly, our unity is found in that we have one Lord leading us...

- verse 5 says: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism."
- A. The one who is called our one Lord is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 1. This is not to say that the Father and the Spirit are not our Lord,
 - but the scriptures especially present Jesus as Lord.

- He is the one who was declared by the Father to be Lord and Christ after He had purged our sins.
 - He is the One who came to earth in order that He might be our prophet, priest and King,
 - our redeemer who would lead us out of our sin and misery into life.
 - Indeed, it is the Spirit who works within us to impart new life to us...
 - but the life He imparts to us is the life that turns to Jesus as our Lord—
 - When you have the Spirit, you always turn to Christ as Lord and begin to trust in Him.
 - In other words, our eyes are upon Jesus when the Spirit produces new life within.
 - Jesus works from outside while the Spirit works from within.
 - Jesus gives us the word and the gospel, and the Spirit enables us to believe and obey.
2. And I say that when we once see what the Lord Jesus has done to accomplish our salvation,
- there is no question about whether we should follow Him or not!
 - We are like Peter when many people rejected Jesus and Jesus asked Peter if he was also going to depart...
 - And Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!”
 - If you once see who He is and what He has done to save His people—
 - if once you have grasped it,
 - there will be no one else to follow—you will call Him Lord.
 - Once you realise that He actually gave Himself to bear God’s curse in order to secure pardon for His people...
 - and once you realise that whoever believes in Him partakes of this pardon...
 - and that this is what is required by the God who made you...
 - What other Lord could there ever be for you?
 - Who else are you going to follow?
 - How could you ever follow anyone else?
 - To us—to us who believe—there is one Lord Jesus Christ.

- There is no other to compare with Him! We can't even *conceive* of any that could possibly compare to Him.
3. And if there is someone who thinks there are other lords that are just as good,
- that person does not really know the Lord Jesus Christ...
 - That is a person with whom you do not have the unity that is spoken about in our text...
 - Even if he thinks that there might be other lords that are even remotely comparable to Him—you will know that your friend has not yet come to know Him.
 - You must not for a moment allow the notion to be promoted in the church that there might be other lords besides our Lord Jesus Christ...
 - or other ways to be reconciled with our holy God!
 - How could there be!
 - Why would God give up His Son if there were other ways?
 - Especially when His Son whom He loved earnestly prayed that if there were any other way, He might be spared?
 - True Christian unity is not that sickening unity that talks about being one in Christ and then embraces those as brethren who reject Christ...
 - Those like Robert Schuler who have unity conferences to bring Muslims and Christians and other religions together in some unity that is not this unity in one Lord Jesus Christ!
 - Such a thing is most pernicious and most dishonouring to our Lord!
 - You who love the Lord Jesus must not tolerate it!

B. But see how this having one Lord brings us who believe in Him together as one!

1. Having one Lord means that we have only one way that we are all seeking to follow...
 - There is, as it says here, one faith and one baptism...
 - a. The one faith is the one body of truth that we have in common as Christians...
 - We are all given the same thing to believe...
 - We are all following the same Lord and so we all have the same doctrine.
 - We are all walking together under the same instruction.
 - b. You will say, “But we don't have the same doctrine—we have many different opinions and many different views...”

- 1) That is true enough, but it is essentially the same for all who are true Christians...
 - We have unity in that we believe that God has spoken in His word and that we are to find what we believe from the scriptures.
 - With that as our common ground, we may spar with our fellow believers,
 - but our sparing will be about what the Bible says rather than about our own opinions.
 - Our goal will be to find out what is right according to God's Word rather than to put forth our own ideas.
 - 2) And anyone who comes honestly to the scriptures with a willingness to be taught of God...
 - anyone in whom God's Spirit has done a work—will come to the same essential understanding...
 - namely, that Jesus Christ is the Lord and that He is the only way of salvation...
 - That person will give up on Himself and He will trust in the Lord Jesus alone.
 - There may be secondary differences, but there will be unity on the gospel.
2. And this brings us to the one baptism...
- a. We are not baptised in the name of Paul or of Peter or anyone else, but we are baptised into the One Lord Jesus Christ...
 - Baptism is the symbol of God's cleansing of us from our guilt and sin through Jesus and on the basis of His offering for us on the cross...
 - and this cleansing is found in Him alone—that is why there is only one baptism.
 - We are either baptised into Christ and cleansed by Him, or we are not really baptised.
 - b. And seeing that we are all cleansed by this one baptism in Christ,
 - we have unity in it...
 - We share in our Lord's work.
 - Together we rely upon Him to take away our sins and give us new life.
 - If anyone claims to have cleansing in some other way—even by the mere ritual of baptism itself,
 - we do not have unity with such a person...

- c. Therefore, if you are to endeavour to maintain the unity that God has given us in Christ,
 - you will endeavour to promote this one way of salvation—this one baptism—this one cleansing in which every believer rests...
 - You will continue to rest in it and you will encourage your brothers and sisters to rest in it...
 - and you will try to persuade those who are without to rest in it.
 - God has not called you to preserve unity in some other baptism—some other religion—some other Lord—some other faith...
 - To set up or tolerate some other is to sow discord, not unity...
 - It may seem sweet to accept what everyone believes, but it is in fact highly destructive, not only to them, but also to you and to the cause of Christ in the world—and even to the honour of Christ.
 - Here is the One who made the ultimate sacrifice and you are tolerating the notion that some other way is just as sufficient!
 - It calls into question the genuineness of your own faith!
 - How can you show such contempt for your crucified Saviour?
 - There is only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism...

TRANS> Now lets take a look at the third foundation of our unity...

III. Thirdly, our unity is found in that we have one God and Father working out His saving plan for us.

- The words of verse 6 are,
 - Eph 4:6: one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

A. Brothers and sisters, the whole of our salvation is of God...

1. It is He who, as we saw in chapter 1, elected us before the foundation of the world.
 - It is He who works all things after the counsel of His own will.
 - All that we see in the world,
 - and especially in the church,
 - is the outworking of His sovereign plan.
 - He is the one who determined that He would bring us into His very own household to live in glory with Him.

2. And as He is here called our Father,
 - we are assured this God who is above all and through all, and in all is at work in us as His children...
 - He is called our Father because He bears the relation of Father to us...
 - And because He is a perfect Father, we know that He will provide for our happiness and well being as His children...
 - He will train us and provide all things for our prosperity...
 - And because He is a Father who is above all,
 - A father of unlimited power and unlimited resources,
 - we are assured that He will be more than able to truly bless His children and to make us happy...
 - He is will bend the whole universe to bring good to us!
 - As the Hiedelberg Catechism puts it so well:
 - we can confidently affirm that “without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation.”
 - My Father is over all, and He is working all things for our salvation!

B. And our unity is that we who believe all have this same Father.

1. We look around us and we see a lot of chaos in the Church...
 - a. we see strife and division and error,
 - We may at times even wonder how the church can survive when we see all the problems.
 - b. But here is the beauty of it...
 - God is over all this—He is above it, He is working through it, He is working in us and among us...
 - He is intimately involved with us to bring us where we need to be.
 - He is a very connected Father, and all these seemingly disjointed pieces only so many aspects of His marvellous plan...
 - Let Judas betray the Lord, let the chief priests crucify Him and the disciples forsake Him...
 - Let Him die and be buried...
 - God is over all it all, working through it all, and in it all.

- Let the church go into a period of darkness...
 - let there be anarchy and confusion and false doctrine and false worship and all the rest...
 - But God is over it all and working through it all and in all of us who are His...
 - Let Joseph's brothers sell him to slavery in Egypt, let him be cast into prison, let there be a famine that nearly destroys the house of Jacob...
 - but God has a plan—a wonderful marvellous plan that He is working out...
 - He is over it all and in it all and working through it all...
 - Let Pharaoh oppress His people and let them nearly forget their God—even Moses who lost hope and did not even bother to circumcise His Son...
 - God is over it and working through it all and in it all of His elect...
 - This has always been the way He has worked
 - Remember what it says in Ephesians 1:8?
 - that He caused His grace to abound to us in all wisdom and prudence... working it all out in a marvellous dispensation—
 - unfolding His plan in a most remarkable way before our eyes?
2. Our unity is that this same Father is still at work in all of us His children today...
- a. He is above all that we see around us,
 - He is working through all of us...
 - And He is working in us.
 - b. It is His wonderful way to take what seems so hopeless and bring marvellous things out of it.
 - This means that you don't need to get so upset about your Christian brothers and sisters who are difficult for you to deal with...
 - God has brought them along your pathway in order to accomplish His purpose in you and in them...
 - and you are not to cast them off or reject them—
 - You are to learn to discern God's hand in them.
 - He is using us, with all our imperfections, to bring glory to His name and to shape us into His glorious household of perfect love.

- c. It is not for you to reject your brother when God has accepted Him...
 - In fact, the scripture teaches that if you hate your brother, it is a sign that you do not yet know God in a saving way...
 - You are not a part of this unity, this family with God as your father...
 - It is impossible for God to be their Father and your Father and for you to not be their brother—
 - and so it is for you to endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit with your brethren, knowing that God has put you together with them in His family.

And so my brothers and sisters, you see in Ephesians 4:4-6 what real Christian unity is all about.

- It is not a unity that begins with each other, but it is a unity that is centred in the God of our salvation, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - This is the unity of the Spirit that you are to endeavour to keep and to walk in.
 - It is a unity that finds itself not in accommodating each other, but in conforming to the Lord...
 - It is a unity that seeks to go to Him and draw others to Him rather than to leave them cut off from Him.
 - Let us pursue this unity with earnestness, for this is the unity to which He has called us as His children.
 - Our happiness is not found with each going his own way, but with joining together to follow the Father.
 - When this congregation was first formed, you solemnly promised and covenanted that you would
 - “in reliance upon God’s grace, walk together as an organised congregation... working toward the purity and unity of the Church.”
 - Brothers and sisters, let us move along together with the whole church of God in the unity of the
 - Spirit who has given us new life and hope...
 - the Lord Jesus, who brings us to the Father as our redeemer...
 - and to the Father, who works all things for our salvation.