

Good morning! Please pray with me.

I'm always grateful for every LaPierre baby, not only because of a new life being born into the world, but because it often affords me an opportunity to bring a message to you all. So, I hope Scott and Katie have at least another hundred or so children....

Whenever I have an opportunity like this, I take my time thinking about what the Lord would have me preach. Usually, I settle on scripture that deals with something that is heavy on my heart at the time. This Lord's Day is no different. Please turn in your bibles to Ephesians 4:1-6 and stand with me for the reading of God's word.

1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as 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 above all, and through all, and in you all.

The title of the message this morning is "A Walk Worthy of our Calling".

As we begin to unpack these verses, I want you to notice first that Paul refers to himself as "**the prisoner of the Lord.**" I believe he does this for a couple of reasons. First, it lends additional weight to what he's about to say. He has suffered for the proclamation of the Gospel, and the reminder of that here should have us perk up ready to listen to whatever comes next.

The second reason I believe he mentions being the prisoner of the Lord is to cause us to think carefully about our freedom. As a prisoner, his ability to walk freely was restricted - he could not go wherever he wished, and he acknowledges that this is the Lord's will for him. So, what is the Lord's will for us?

He says, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy....”** While we can walk wherever we wish, if Christ is our Lord, we are not free to walk however we wish.

You’ll probably notice from the heading above verse one that the theme of these verses deals with unity in the church. Some of your headings probably say something like “Unity of the Spirit,” or “Unity in the Body of Christ,” or perhaps “Walk in Unity”. All of those appropriately describe Paul’s message in these verses. He is going to describe how all Christians ought to conduct themselves in the Household of God. Very simply, a worthy walk is one that maintains unity in the church.

There is a sense in which we have unity in the church independent of our conduct. 1 Corinthians 12:13 says, **“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free...”** That is past tense. If you are in Christ, you have been baptized into one body. This is a spiritual baptism as opposed to physical (water) baptism. This baptism into one body explains the unity we have with other believers.

- It’s the reason for the care you feel when you hear news reports about Christians suffering persecution on the other side of the world. You don’t know them personally, but you care because they are your brothers and sisters in Christ.
- It explains the instant affinity and fellowship you can have with a person you’ve just met when you discover they are a Christian. It’s a unity that transcends race, nationality, social and economic status - everything that divides people.

This “one body” that we have been baptized into is often referred to as the “universal church,” because it is made up of all believers globally.

All of that is true, but there is another sense in which we don’t yet have perfect unity. For a moment, skip down to verses 11-13: **11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of**

the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

So, we have unity, and we are also still coming to unity. Or, I think it would be better to word it this way: We have unity, but we don't yet have unity as we ought to have unity. We don't have unity the way we would if we were "**a perfect man**" or if we measured up to "**the stature of the fullness of Christ.**"

Verse 3 in our text this morning says we must endeavor **to keep the unity of the Spirit**. Why do we need to endeavor to keep what we already have?

Here is the distinction I want to make: The unity we have already is positional unity in the universal church. What we lack (what we must progress and grow in) is practical unity in the local church.

It's very easy for me to reflect on the unity I have in Christ with fellow believers in China, Afghanistan, or any number of other countries. My heart hurts for them when I hear of the persecution they suffer. It's easy to think about how we will all be together one day in Heaven for eternity worshiping our Lord together. I have no trouble at all understanding the unity I have with them in Christ, and there is no threat of division between myself and them. Why? Because they live far away from me. I don't live out my faith with them in a local church.

It is the local church where:

- doctrinal differences must be confronted, worked out, or laid aside for unity's sake.
- personalities clash.
- deeply held convictions meet Christian liberty and vice versa.
- forgiveness must be given and received.
- expectations are not met or needs go unnoticed.
- differences of preference on carpet color, programs, outreach, and any number of other issues must be discussed and resolved.

I want you to look carefully at the language in verses 2 and 3 of our text this morning: we must be **bearing with one another in love** and **endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit**. The way these verses are worded makes it clear that these are qualities needed at all times. We must be continually doing these things. For that reason, it is clear that conflict in the local church is presupposed. It is a foregone conclusion.

He doesn't say:

- “Now and again humility may be necessary.”
- “You might need to put up with people who are difficult.”
- “There will be times you'll need to pursue peace.”

No, the need to pursue peace with each other all the time implies what? It implies that drifting toward conflict is our natural inclination. Why is that?

I could say congregations drift toward conflict because they are made up of such disparate people. Think of our own congregation:

- We have young and old.
- We have married, single, divorced, and widowed.
- We have homeschool families and public school families.
- We have big families and small families.
- We have families who are heavily involved in politics.
- We have families who are pro-vaccine, and families who are anti-vaccine.

All of that is true, and those differences may lead to conflict as a secondary cause, but it is not the root of the problem.

The root of the problem brings me to Lesson 1 on your bulletins:

Lesson 1: We have unity, but sin threatens it.

Local churches drift toward conflict because they are made up of flawed individuals who are not yet free of their fallen, sinful flesh. Listen to this quote from Gotquestions.org that I really appreciated: *Churches are like hospitals, full of*

wounded and sick people, but in the church the sickness is sin and the wounds are those we inflict upon ourselves and one another because of sin.

Were you aware that spreading division in the household of God is sin? I should clarify that statement so that I'm not misunderstood. There are legitimate, biblical reasons for division. Romans 16:7 says, "**Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.**" It may seem ironic, but we are supposed to divide from those who cause what? Divisions.

Think about the division that is caused by picking up offenses, gossip, slander, creating factions, etc. I could be wrong, but I don't believe we treat this sort of divisiveness as seriously as scripture does.

Listen to Galatians 5:19-21: **19 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, 21 envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.**

Contentions and dissensions are a work of the flesh. Contentions have the idea of strife or conflict. Dissensions, on the other hand, refer to working division or discord. If this is practiced - if this characterizes your life - scripture says it is evidence that you are not a Christian. That's how serious this issue is.

Here is the point I want to make with this lesson: Pursuing unity in the church means warring against the natural desires of the flesh. The opposite is also true: Those who pursue division are giving into - or making peace with the desires of their flesh.

James 4:1 - **Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members?**

Titus 3:9-11 - **9 But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. 10 Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, 11 knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.**

Look at verse 2 to see the qualities Paul wants us to walk in.

- He wants us to be lowly, or humble. But our flesh is what? Haughty.
- He wants us to be gentle, but our flesh is what? Harsh.
- He wants us to be longsuffering, but our flesh is what? Impatient.
- He wants us to bear with one another, or you could say, he wants us to be self-controlled, but our flesh is what? Emotional. Angry. Hot-tempered.

Do you see how Paul is exhorting us to rise above our sinful fleshly impulses in the pursuit of unity? The qualities he lists are essentially a repetition of the fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23 which says, **“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.** He’s not asking the impossible of us. He is asking us to walk in the Spirit, displaying the sort of conduct that the Spirit desires to produce in us.

You need to understand, this is not a minor issue to Paul. This isn’t a trivial matter to him. The language used to describe this appeal is strong. Verse 1 says, **“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you...”** He is not making a casual request. He is begging.

1 Cor 1:10 uses similar language - actually the same word in the Greek. It says, **“Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you...”**

Why does he use such strong language?

Because when a church is divided - when there is dissension and factions - it is a black eye upon our faith.

That brings me to the next lesson on your bulletins.

Lesson 2: Division heaps shame upon

Part 1: Our high calling.

In verse 1 Paul is begging us to “**walk worthy of the calling with which you were called...**” The Greek word translated “worthy” is “axios”. It is where we get the English word “axis”, and it has the idea of a balance scale. Picture an ancient merchant weighing out a payment in gold. The scales balance when the weight of gold corresponds to the value of the item being purchased.

In our case, the scales balance when our conduct is worthy of our calling.

In order to understand how we ought to walk we need to have a clear knowledge of what Paul means by the word “calling.” If we don’t understand the value of our calling, we have no hope of walking in a manner worthy of it. We don’t need to go far to see verses that discuss this. The word “therefore” in our text points us backwards to truths he has already established in the previous chapters.

In fact, I believe he is pointing backwards to everything he has written so far in the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters of Ephesians are filled with doctrine. They are rich with great and marvelous truths about our salvation in Christ. He establishes all of that important teaching and then with the word “therefore” he moves from teaching to exhortation. To borrow John MacArthur’s words, he moves from “*positional to practical truth, from doctrine to duty, principle to practice.*”

So, let’s look back at a few verses in chapter 1 that discuss our calling to see what he is referring to. Turn with me to chapter 1 and let’s read Ephesians 1:3-7 together. While you’re turning there, I want to point out that these verses do not use the word “calling” directly like some others do, but they nevertheless discuss God’s sovereign intent and determination to bless a people in Christ.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He

chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

Such magnificent truths. Brothers and sisters, these verses describe your high calling in Christ. Every time I read Ephesians chapter 1, I'm blown away by the love of God toward us. Paul says He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing, and he goes on to list some of them. The first is election.

If we are in Christ, God chose us before the foundation of the world. Or, that is to say, He chose us before we ever lived - before we did anything good or bad. Which means that human merit has nothing at all to do with our salvation. God chose us and then called us to salvation through the gospel.

The next is adoption in verse 5. He planned out from the beginning that we would be adopted into His family. Salvation itself is a spiritual blessing that defies human understanding, but this is a blessing beyond even that. Even unbelievers desire to be God's children. They lay claim on that title, but it is God who predestines to adoption, and the right to become children of God is given through faith in His Son. Do you see how high this calling is, to be adopted into the very family of God?

Paul goes on to list more spiritual blessings, but the last one I want to look at this morning is in verse 7. God has given us redemption through His (that is Christ's) blood. Verse 7 describes the single greatest act of love that has ever occurred or ever will occur. The eternal God - the Creator and Sustainer of all things - stepped down from His place of glory in Heaven and humbled Himself to become like one of us. When I say "He stepped down", we might imagine walking down a flight of stairs. No! He stepped from unimaginable heights to staggering depths.

Philippians 2:7 says that he **“...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.”**

He came initially as an infant - helpless, dependent, and needy. He grew into a man who was poor, despised, and misunderstood. He went to the cross hated, rejected, and afflicted. He was not afflicted for His own sin, but for yours and mine. Isaiah 53:10 says, **“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt....”**

Philippians 2:8 says **“He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”** By His shed blood we have been redeemed. By His death we have been given life. The reason our calling is so high is because the cost to purchase it was so high.

Who can measure Christ’s love? Are you able to weigh it out? Who can quantify His mercy? God is infinite, and therefore His love is infinite as well. It is impossible for us to fully grasp Him or any of His attributes. That is one reason why the Gospel is always new to us, always precious. The wonder of it can never be exhausted. So, I don’t believe we can wrap our minds around it, but we can have an overwhelming sense that it is massive. It is weighty and beyond our ability to fully grasp.

I want you to notice something about Ephesians 1:3-7. Every action was performed by God:

- He blessed.
- He chose.
- He predestined.
- He adopted.
- He accepted us.
- He redeemed us by His blood, by His grace.

And, all of it was according to the good pleasure of His will. You were called to this high position - chosen, saved, adopted, and redeemed.

Brothers and sisters, how ought we to live in light of these things?

Where is pride? Is it not dead, and forever off-limits to us? Is there anything in Ephesians 1:3-7 where we can point and say, “See, this good thing about me is why God saved me”? Further, if our Savior so humbled Himself, ought we not also to follow His example? Shouldn’t the undeserving, who were blessed with such spiritual riches, rightly walk in all humility and lowliness?

Paul instructs us to walk with “**all lowliness**” because pride is unworthy of our great calling and it leads to division. The proud see problems in everyone else, but never themselves. They burden themselves with the speck in everyone else’s eye and cannot see the plank in their own eye. They demand to be heard. They have all the solutions, and woe to you if you don’t listen! Pride leads to division because it says “Look at me! Listen to me!” Humility leads to unity because it says, “Look at Christ! Listen to Him!”

What about gentleness? Has God not been profoundly gentle toward us by not dealing with us according to our sins? How then can we excuse being harsh with our brothers and sisters in Christ? It is unbecoming. It is shameful for a person who has been forgiven so great a debt to turn around and harshly demand exacting justice from a brother.

That’s why, when we read the parable of the Unforgiving Servant we can’t help but feel a great sense of righteous anger toward him. He was forgiven of an immense debt by the merciful king and then turned around and seized his fellow man by the throat for a tiny sum.

That is a perfect picture of what we do when we withhold forgiveness and deal harshly with a brother in Christ. God has forgiven us of an immense debt, how can we attempt to keep anyone indebted to us?

We should do for others what God has done for us. Ephesians 4:32 says, “**be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.**” Let us do what is right as befitting a people who have received God’s longsuffering mercy. Has God run out of patience for you yet? Then neither should you lose patience with a brother or sister in Christ.

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 3:3 - **For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

He's saying when there is division in the household of God, you're acting as if the Spirit has had no influence upon you. You are displaying none of the marks of regenerate hearts. You are behaving as natural, unsaved people would be expected to behave.

Do you see how pride, severity, and impatience that lead to division are unworthy of people who have received the riches of God's grace?

Turn back to Ephesians 4 and read verses 1-3 with me again. **1 I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**

So, here is what Paul says. Take your calling - your election, your salvation, your adoption - take the immeasurable love of God toward you, and put it on one side of the balance scale. Now, place your Christian walk in relation to your brothers and sisters in the church on the other side. Does the scale balance?

It might feel very pious to say, "No! How could anything that we do come close to comparing with what God has done!" That has the sound of truth to it, but that's not what scripture says. Scripture says that scale should balance. Paul says our conduct should be worthy - it should correspond to our calling.

Here is the point I want to make: It is possible to treat a great act of love shamefully. Think of a father who faithfully sacrifices his time working two jobs to send his son to medical school only to have that son squander his time there with drunkenness and wasteful living. Think of a soldier returning from war wounded only to be met by protests from the people he fought for.

I tell you, we are more moved and grieved by those scenarios than we are when fellow brothers and sisters in Christ heap shame upon God's love, mercy and grace

by dividing His church.

Your conduct in the household of God in regards to unity and division either honors your calling in Christ or brings shame to it.

So, let us walk in a worthy manner to honor Christ - understanding that His attention is always upon us. Not only that, we need to remember that the world is watching our conduct as well.

That brings me to the second part of Lesson 2 on your bulletins:

Lesson 2: Division heaps shame upon...

Part 2: Our witness.

We need to remember that those outside of the church see our walk and draw conclusions from what they see.

Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:3 - **For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?**

Unbelievers understand this seemingly better than Christians do. They look upon our division and say, “See! They are no different than the rest of us. They preach about God’s love, but they can’t even avoid fighting each other.”

They may not be able to explain regeneration or sanctification, but they understand on a basic level that Christians are supposed to live differently than unbelievers. And, when we don’t, they rejoice.

Why? Because, It confirms what they already think about the gospel - that it is nothing but a fairytale. It confirms what they already believe about God - that He is powerless. When Christians fight Christians, it gives the unbeliever reason to sarcastically say, “Behold the power of God,” and scoff at Him. When religious people preach one thing and do the very thing they have preached against, Romans 2:24 says, “...**the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.**”

Our lives are supposed to cause unbelievers to glorify God, not blaspheme His name! Matthew 5:16 says, **“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”**

Jesus preached this truth. He taught that it would be by our love for one another that unbelievers would know we followed Him. John 13:35 says, **“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”** We are familiar with that verse, I think, but to quote it that way is missing a great deal of context. The preceding verse, John 13:34 says this, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you....”**

The type of love that will silence the scoffing of unbelievers and show them that we truly are Christ’s disciples is to love each other as Christ loved us.

How did Christ love us? He loved sacrificially. John 15:13 says, **“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.”** We love that, but you know what? Because of our sinful flesh - because of our pride - sometimes we won’t even lay down a preference for our friends. Sometimes we refuse to lay down even a minor offense for our friends.

When a conflict gets out of hand and Christians begin to divide, it’s because they’ve stopped laying down their lives for their friends, and instead begin laying down their friends for their lives.

All over scripture the church is described in ways that highlight our unity. We are called the bride of Christ, God’s household, one flock, one building, and perhaps most familiar, the body of Christ. When offenses come, we need to handle them in a way that maintains that unity and does no harm to our witness.

The biblical instructions for conflict resolution are invisible to the outside world. Unbelievers cannot see brothers practicing Matthew 18:15. They can not see when we lay down offenses for the sake of unity. They WILL see a brother who takes up a sword to divide the body of Christ. They will see it and scoff.

When two women stood before Solomon, both claiming the same baby as their own, Solomon, in his wisdom said, “**Bring me a sword.**” He commanded the child be divided into two so that each woman would receive half. (1 Kings 3:24-25) The real mother of the baby, because of her great love for him, laid aside her rights saying, “**O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means kill him!**” (1 Kings 3:26) Our great love for Christ and His church should have us ready to humbly lay down offenses, preferences, opinions, and any other non-essential grievance that threatens our unity.

One of the last things on the heart of Jesus before his arrest and trial was the unity of the church. In His high priestly prayer in John 17:20-21, He prayed to the Father saying, “**I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, [and here’s why] that the world may believe that You sent Me.**”

When Christians divide, it destroys the sign Jesus desires our unity to be to the unbelieving world. He prayed that our unity would be so extraordinary in a fallen world of continuous conflict that it could only be explained supernaturally. He wants our unity to be an undeniable proof that He really was sent into the world to redeem a people for Himself. So, when we divide His body, we are found to be fighting against the purposes of our Lord. If He is Lord, and He is, we must align our purposes to His.

That brings me to Lesson 3. (Which is an extension of Lesson 1.)

Lesson 3: We have unity, but we must keep it.

Verse 3 says we must be “**endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**” I want to give you a few ways each of us can practically keep unity in the church.

One way to stop an offense from ever taking root is to simply accept being wronged. Our pride doesn’t like this at all! This does not sit well with the American mindset of demanding our rights, but we should be biblically-minded,

not culturally minded. It is Christlike to forgive even in the midst of suffering. As He was being crucified, our Lord was busy asking the Father to forgive those who held the hammer and nails.

Have we forgotten that Jesus taught non-retaliation?

Matthew 5:39-40 says: **39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also.**

In the Corinthian church, divisions were so bad that apparently they were taking each other to law before unbelieving judges. Listen to how Paul rebukes them severely.

1 Corinthians 6:6-7 - **...brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!**

7 Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?

“What? And, let them get away with it?” Yes!

Accepting wrongs from our brothers and sisters in Christ accords with the qualities Paul lists in our text to pursue unity. Think of it, why is it so hard to accept offenses? It's because our pride will not let it go. Humility leads to quick forgiveness because the humble person recognizes they are a sinner just like the person who offended them.

Obviously, accepting a wrong and choosing to set it aside is exceedingly gentle, but it also displays patience or longsuffering. Some sins are so serious that they must be dealt with immediately. Some, though minor, if continually practiced, must be dealt with biblically by going to that person and rebuking them, but it is commendable to lovingly choose to overlook offenses. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “**And**

above all things have fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins.’” Our love for one another and our desire for unity should have us quick to forgive, and quick to move on.

In the previous lesson, I said that when unbelievers see Christians fighting Christians, it causes them to doubt the power of God. However, when a Christian cannot accept being wronged, but insists on retribution, they too are doubting God’s power to act. They are doubting the Holy Spirit can bring about repentance. They are doubting that God will chasten His children.

We need to take the example of our Lord (1 Peter 2:23) - **23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously...**

Accepting wrongs committed against us makes us like Christ and shows that our trust is in the Father to judge righteously and act on our behalf. Are we greater than Christ? Is it more of an offense to sin against us than it was to sin against Him? If He, being perfect, refused to retaliate, how much worse is it for us who are merely guilty sinners to hold offenses and seek vengeance against a brother or sister in Christ?

So, one very practical way to keep the unity we have in Christ is to avoid quarrels altogether by choosing not to pick up offenses, but here is another very closely related: Avoid quarrels that do not directly involve you.

I said earlier that if we follow the biblical instructions for conflict resolution, the outside world will not witness any division - but neither will other Christians.

If you have a conflict with a fellow believer, your instructions in Matthew 18:15-17 are to go to that person and, **“tell him his fault between you and him alone.”** If he won’t hear you, you bring in two or three witnesses to confront him again. If he still refuses to hear you, then you bring the matter before the church.

The reason scripture instructs us to minimize the amount of people who know of a sin between brothers is because of the great deal of damage that is caused by

gossip. Gossip tends to be sensationalized. It tends to include a lot of misinformation or exaggerations that lead to further conflict and division. Gossip is the means by which one offense has many children. Listen to what Proverbs says about gossip:

Proverbs 26:20 - **Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.**

Gossip is compared to what? Not fire, like you might expect, but fuel that keeps a fire going. Gossip is the fuel that keeps strife burning hot.

Here's another: Proverbs 17:9 - **He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.** (Oh, how we need to let this sink into our hearts. Let us commit to ending gossip!)

Here are some questions to ask to help identify gossip:

- Do I need to know this?
 - Is it wrong for someone to come tell me about something one of my children did wrong? No, as their parent, I need to know.
- Does this information tarnish someone's reputation?
- Would you discuss this if the person were present to hear it?
- Is what is being shared embarrassing?
- Why is this being shared? Is it to build up or to tear down?

If you're speaking to someone and you realize that the conversation may be turning toward gossip, say something! You can be non-confrontational by even saying, "Oh, I might be tempted to gossip if we continue talking about that."

We can avoid other people's quarrels right at the outset by simply not hearing what we shouldn't, but what if you do somehow know of a quarrel between believers? Do not get drawn into it!

When people pick up an offense that they cannot let go of, sometimes the biblical instructions for conflict resolution go out the window! The directions to minimize the number of people who know of an offense are abandoned. Sometimes the

offended person decides the best way to determine who is right is by the sheer number of people who agree with them!

This is when things truly get ugly. This is when letters get circulated. This is when you begin to get private messages from people who may have never messaged you before. You need to recognize what those messages are: They are recruitment efforts. They want to pull you into a faction.

Listen, there may be genuine grievances between brothers. Remember, the church is a spiritual hospital full of sinners. I'm not minimizing that, but unless you are a second or third witness or asked to judge a dispute, there is no place in scripture where you are called to join in the quarrel between two brothers. In fact, we are warned about the danger of doing so:

1 Peter 4:15 - But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

Proverbs 26:17 - He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears.

Do you see the application? It is very easy to enter into a quarrel not your own. Before you know it, you're in the fight, but it is very difficult to exit without getting hurt.

One of the ways we can pursue peace is by refusing to be pulled in. Point the people behind those messages to Matthew 18:15-16. Challenge them to act biblically if they believe there is sin in another brother. Ask them why they are contacting you. Ask them what their goal is in attempting to bring you into this quarrel. Ask yourself, why is this person who may have never spoken to me, suddenly sending me private messages about a matter that doesn't directly concern me? Warn them with scripture about divisiveness.

There is one more subpoint to this lesson I want to cover and that is this: We ought to focus more on the weight of what unites us than the comparatively trivial things that divide us.

If you are genuinely Christian, you have already experienced the only division God would have for you. You've been divided from the world. You've been called "**out of darkness into His marvelous light....**" (1 Peter 2:9) You've been "**delivered...from the power of darkness and conveyed...into the kingdom of the Son of His love....**" (Col 1:13).

Do you realize how significant this division is? Let me share some statistics with you that were recently released by the Center for Biblical Worldview. 51% of all adults they polled indicated they possess a biblical worldview. That sounds really good, doesn't it? Sounds like a majority to me!

Unfortunately, what people say is not a great indication of reality. So, they asked this group a number of follow-up questions and the results are stunning. Of this 51% of adults who claim a biblical worldview, 49% accept reincarnation as a possibility after they die. Oh! Now how do we feel about their chances of being genuine Christians?

Here are a few more statistics from the poll:

- Only 33% believe that human beings are born with a sinful nature and can only be saved from the consequences of sin by Jesus Christ.
- Only 29% believe that the best indicator of success in life is consistent obedience to God.

After asking twelve worldview questions like this, they found that although 51% of adults claim to have a biblical worldview, in reality it is closer to 6%.

Do you see how clearly we are divided from the world based on what we believe? If we who have truly been called out of the world are few, and it would seem that is the case, how much more tightly should we hold together in unity? Let's consider for a moment what sets us apart from the world.

Look with me at verses 4-6 in our text this morning. **4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as 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 above all, and through all, and in you all.

What I want you to notice most of all is the exclusivity of these truths. Though man has created many denominations and though there are many local churches, there is ultimately one body composed of all genuine Christians. Think for a moment about how precious - how rare - it is for people to embrace these same truths that you believe.

In these verses we see the Trinity. There is one Spirit - the Holy Spirit, One Lord - Jesus Christ, and one God and Father of all. Three persons that are one God. Belief in the Trinity divides you from the vast majority of the world.

That's not all though, the division goes even further. There are people in this world who believe in the Trinity, but unity with them is impossible because they embrace a false gospel. There are not many gospels, but only one genuine faith that saves. Think for a moment about how many people in your life embrace the Trinity and the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ alone? Truth is exclusive. It divides.

If we are part of the same body, with the same Holy Spirit dwelling within us.... If we share the same calling and the same hope of eternal life.... If we serve the same Lord and have the same faith.... If we all have the same Father through adoption by faith in Jesus Christ... Friends! If God has made us one, how dare we tear apart what God has joined together?

Look around you at your brothers and sisters in Christ. Consider the weight of truth that simultaneously unites you together with them, and divides you from the world. Compared to that, how trivial is anything that could improperly break our unity?

I want to conclude with one last thought. The Father planned our unity, the Son purchased our unity, and the Holy Spirit accomplished our unity. Let us then resolve to keep it.

I'll be up front after service, I'd consider it a blessing to speak with you or answer any questions. Let's pray.