

All for One and One for All  
Ephesians 4:1-16  
August 2, 2015

*I [Paul], a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, “When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.” (In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Many of you are familiar with the novel by Alexander Dumas entitled *The Three Musketeers*. The heroes of that story had as their motto “All for one and one for all.” That meant that each member was ready and willing to fight for the group or any member of the group. In other words, they vowed to stand together in any and all circumstances.

In today’s text, Paul is trying to get the Christians in Ephesus to adopt as their motto “All for one and one for all.” Furthermore, what was good for the church at Ephesus is good for Prince of Peace. We, too, must have the spirit of “All for one and one for all.”

As you read this section of Scripture, it’s not hard to see that God expects us, as a church family, to walk together in absolute unity. You can also see that unity is not just possible, it’s a must, if Prince of Peace is going to be the kind of church God wants it to be.

If you read through the first three chapters of Ephesians, you’ll find Paul explaining a good deal of Christian doctrine. When you come to chapter four, you see that Paul is telling us that there is no separating Christian doctrine from Christian unity. The bottom line is; Where there is genuine faith there will be genuine unity.

Christian unity is a major theme in Paul’s epistles. Paul told the Philippian believers: *Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ. Then ... I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the Gospel* (Phil 1:27). And, to the church at Corinth, he wrote: *I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord*

*Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought* (1 Cor 1:10).

Unity is a tall order for any group of humans – Christians included. Everyone wants things his or her way. An old Irish proverb says:

To live above with the Saints we love,  
Ah, that's the purest glory.  
To live below with the Saints we know,  
Ah, that's another story!

For that reason, the Holy Spirit didn't just inspire Paul to tell us to be unified, he also had Paul show us what unity requires.

For us to be united in the Lord, we need to find the basis for our unity. We all come from different backgrounds. We have different cultural heritages. We have different economic standings. We have different lifestyles. Commonality seems almost unattainable, and it would be unattainable if all we do is look at our differences. To be united, we must look at the things we have in common.

To begin with, we all share common ground. On the night before Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus prayed that his disciples would be "one." In the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, we hear Jesus saying: *My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me* (John 17:20-23).

To help us see our common ground, Paul lists seven things that all Christians share: *"There is **one body and one Spirit** – just as you were called to **one hope** when you were called – **one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all**"* (Eph 4:4-6). These seven gifts from God unite all believers from Creation to the Last Day. When we stop looking at ourselves as individuals, and we begin looking at ourselves as one body in Christ, we will have taken a great step toward Christian unity.

Besides common ground, we all share a common grace. Verse seven says: *To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it* (Eph 4:7). We all share God's endless grace. One of the blessings of that grace is the spiritual gifts that God places in his people.

God has given every believer something special to share with others. The gifts listed in our text show that God gives us spiritual gifts in order to build up the church; understand, of course, that the church is not a building but the body of believers.

How sad it is when Christians fail to use their spiritual gifts. Sadder yet, is when God's people use the gifts he has given them to tear the church apart instead of building it up.

Now that we know where unity originates, how do we go about practicing, protecting, and strengthening our unity? Notice I didn't say anything about creating unity. That's because Paul doesn't say we should be making unity. Unity isn't something we create. Unity is a gift from God. Verse three reads: *Make every effort to **keep** the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace* (Eph 4:3). Our job isn't to develop unity, but to keep the unity the Holy Spirit has given to the church.

Keeping the unity of the Spirit requires us to have four Christian qualities. **First is humility.** To be humble is to have an accurate assessment of yourself. It means recognizing your own insignificance while see value and worth in other people. Scripture tells us: *Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others*" (Phil 2:4).

Being humble is about getting off your self-made pedestal and realizing that if it wasn't for the grace of God you would still be a hell-bound sinner. Maintaining a humble attitude helps us remember we are not perfect. And that thought helps us maintain unity by dealing gently with those who have somehow stumbled.

**Our next Christian quality is gentleness.** The King James Version calls this meekness. To be meek is not the same as being weak. The Greek word for meek means power under control. It means having the power to react, but not reacting.

Being meek can be a matter of keeping your mouth shut when you have a real desire to tell someone exactly what you think. Being meek means there are times when you react with gentleness instead of anger. Being meek means not passing on that juicy piece of gossip, even if you know it's true.

If meekness, or gentleness, doesn't seem like your cup of tea, remember that being meek puts you in good company. Jesus said: *Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek in the KJV) and humble in heart* (Mt 11:29). He also said: *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth* (Mt 5:5).

**The third quality is patience.** Patience is a matter of having a long fuse. How long is your fuse? How much does it take for you to begin destroying Christian unity? It's sad how little it takes for Christians to turn on each other. Many churches have split over things of no eternal value. Many people have left church over some minor thing that they didn't like. If we are going to maintain unity, we must all learn a good deal of patience.

**The last quality is love.** Paul uses the phrase: *bearing with one another in love* (Eph 4:2). There's a difference between tolerating one another and bearing with one another in love. The love Paul is speaking about is an act of will. It's agape love.

When agape love is a motivating factor in unity, all differences can be set aside. All personal preferences can be ignored. Agape love gives us the power to let other people be themselves. It isn't based on what other people do. It remains strong even in the face

of hurt feelings.

Christian unity is not an easy path, that's why Paul tells us to: *make every effort* (Eph 4:3). It takes work to maintain unity because we are sinful creatures. We are children of God, we are heaven-bound saints, but we are still sinners. For unity to reign in our church, we must work at it. When we fail, we must get back on the track and start again. We must keep our eyes on the goal of unity that God has intended for us.

With all the work of maintaining unity, one might ask if there are any benefits of unity. Yes, there are. When you and I walk together in unity, to the glory of God, we are telling the watching world that what we have is real. Jesus told his disciples: *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (Jn 13:34-35 NIV).

Beyond that, as we walk in unity, we will become what the Lord saved us to be; living proof that Jesus makes a difference in those he touches. Our lives will be a testimony to the world that we are different. We are saved. We are standing together to the glory of God. Our love for each other will draw an unbelieving world to the cross.

Being united won't make us healthy, wealthy, beautiful people. But in God's eyes we will be healthy, wealthy, beautiful Christians. Being united we will be God's people – All for one and one for all.