

Stand Together: Unity

September 13, 2020

Charles Spurgeon once said,

“Some of you may be in great distress of mind, a distress out of which no fellow creature can deliver you.”

Maybe you feel like that this morning. What you are facing seems too vast and ungainly. Too daunting and formidable. Too confusing and perplexing. Too...permanent. I want to shine a ray of fresh hope into your dark musings.

[17] So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, [18] so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. [19] We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, [20] where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:17–20

Do you hear that?

Jesus is more than just dependable. He is our hope. He has already achieved a cosmic victory for you. And where he is you will be also. Hold fast. Even though you might not feel like it—he is holding you tighter than you are holding him.

If Christ has secured an eternal victory for you—he won't forget about you. Your feelings of loneliness are real, your distress is resolute (at times) but Jesus is more real and more resolute.

As a young child, I had severe bouts of asthma. Asthma relentlessly pursued me. Each breath took supreme effort. I spent many nights in the hospital undergoing breathing treatments. My parents were constantly checking my breathing to see if I was wheezing.

When every breath took supreme effort—all I could think about was breathing.

When you can't breathe, all you think about is breathing.

- Afraid that you will never breathe normally.
- Worry about the next attack of asthma when you are breathing normally.
- Daydream about what it would be like to be rid of asthma forever.
- Talk about how hard it is to live with asthma.

When you can't breathe, all you can think about is breathing.

When you can breathe, you don't often think at all about breathing.

I haven't had an asthma attack in two decades, and so I don't think much about my breathing today. When you can breathe normally you don't think about your breathing. Most of you came in today not thinking about your breathing at all—now you are.

We are going to let scripture address us today on something akin to breathing. Something you don't pay much attention to unless things are going wrong.

Church Unity.

Unity is something we don't typically think about unless we don't have it. Dissension in a church is a chaos that is hard to put words to. When you don't have unity—all you can think about is unity.

Afraid you will never experience unity again.
Your talk is dominated by unity.

Why talk about unity now?

Because our American culture is more divided than I have ever seen it. There is a palpable sense of division out there, and if we aren't careful it, can sneak in here. We have to be so very careful. Unity is an underappreciated and widely misunderstood virtue. I think in this cultural moment we have an opportunity to be different than the culture around us.

Today, we are going to be reminded that unity takes hard work—

PROP: Make EVERY effort to stay unified.

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” Ephesians 4:1-6

PRAY

The Walk
The Effort

The Walk—

Verse 1 again,

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,”

That big #4 to the left of “I” interrupts the flow of the book. Paul did not break his letters down into chapters

and verses. These were added later for ease of reference. Look up at the screen—

“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, [15] from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, [16] that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, [17] so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, [18] may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [20] Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, [21] to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” Ephesians 3:14-4:1

Paul prays that the church would understand and experience the all surpassing love of Christ—and as we begin to understand that love we are filled with the very fullness of God. And God can do this. He can do this and greater things than we can ever conceive of. To him be all glory in the church throughout all generations and forever and ever—how?

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

In other words, because God is gracious and abounding in steadfast love and mercy, he sent his only son to die as a substitute so that treasonous rebels could be made right. This he did on his own initiative to provide a way of salvation—to call sinners to himself. He did this on his own and the collection of saved people make up what is called the church. There are millions of particular or local churches, made up of called out people. To him be the glory in and by this church—how?

You and me—walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

In other words, you have been called by God to be a Christian. You did not save yourself. You did not come up with the idea. God acted decisively in your life and changed it forever. Yes we put faith in him, but even that faith is a gift.

He called us out of a life of sin and called us to himself. How must we respond?

Walking in a manner worthy of our calling. OR the Lord has called us his property—every part of our lives MUST reflect that. All of us—all of our lives—everything about us must be impacted and informed by our salvation.

He is saying Act like the Christians you are.

Now, if I were going to talk about what it looked like to be a Christian, I might start with:

Prayer

Bible reading

Worshiping
Confessing Sin
Meditation
Evangelism
Morality
Ethics

But where does Paul start? In essence he says—here is the first way you act like the Christians you are is: Be unified.

Look at verse 2,

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Verse 2 describes how to maintain unity—with all humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love.

While verse 3 tells us that unity is on us all.

³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

“Eager” is a little weak here. When I read eager to maintain unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, it sounds passive. Like, if I get the opportunity I will stay united with my brothers and sisters.

Not the idea.

You have the opportunity, Stay unified. Make strenuous efforts to maintain unity. It is precious and worth fighting for. This means that unity is not just something that happens but we must work hard for it.

Which leads us from the walk to—

The Effort

How do we work to maintain unity?

With great effort. Salvation requires exactly ZERO work for us to do—Unity requires strenuous work. It takes great effort because—it is not natural to be divided when:

- Have differing life experiences
- Have differing educational backgrounds
- Have differing hopes about the future
- Have differing fears about tomorrow
- Have differing opinions
- Have differing interests
- Have differing levels of expertise

In a word we are DIFFERENT.

Shocker. I know.

BUT we are united together in ONE body, bound by ONE Holy Spirit, all with ONE eternal hope, serving ONE all-

powerful Lord, with a COMMON faith in Christ, ONE baptism united to Christ under ONE God and Father of all.

We are very different but the important thing, we have in common.

You see, when we are tempted toward division we elevate secondary matters

“one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

What is the key to making every effort?

² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love.

This means that the greatest enemies of unity are the opposite of humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love.

Humility: Pride

Gentleness: Harshness

Patience: Exasperation

Forbearance: Impatience

Making every effort takes strenuous effort. It takes strength. It is anything but passive. Think about the strength it takes to exhibit—

Humility: It is not natural to consider others more important than yourself. It goes against all of our natural inclinations. It takes strength to make ourselves concerned for the welfare of other people.

Unwilling to argue about masks. That does not mean we all don't have opinions but we can have the strength of humility and refuse to put others or think less of someone because they disagree.

Gentle: This means we don't retaliate. We purpose to quietly and slowly deal with differences we might have with other people. And when we bring them up, it is gentle and with a disposition that says, "I might not be seeing all of this rightly."

It takes strength and great effort to be gentle.

Patient: Courteous and kind toward people who might not deserve the benefit of the doubt. This means you bear with weaknesses, think the best, and be willing to be sinned against. Don't lash out. You keep anger at bay.

It takes strength and great effort to be patient.

Forbear: You are not blind to the shortcomings of others, but you move to help and serve even when you are the offended party. You see shortcomings and bear with the other person again and again.

Make EVERY effort.

Do not lose ONE opportunity to show

Humility

Gentleness

Patient

Forbearance

Unity is NOT

Uniformity—

- Not all of us are going to look the same, dress the same, think the same, or be the same. Unity is not based on uniformity. Uniformity says, it does not matter what you think or the questions you have—just fall in line.

That is NOT biblical unity.

I'll give you an example. I've been here leading this church for 18 years. In those days—the church had a large, even a majority of members who believed in homeschooling. Fine. All parents need to seek God

and determine what they believe is the best option for their child.

Our problem was that many said, “Homeschooling was the ONLY godly option.” Homeschooling makes for a rotten foundation of unity.

What do we unite around?

“one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

NOT politics
NOT wearing a mask
NOT NOT wearing a mask
NOT Schooling preferences
Philosophy of Government

A united people are not afraid to welcome in a variety of opinions when it comes to—

Politics
Masks
Schooling
Government Philosophy
Taxes
Right to bear arms
COVID response

Even willing to talk interact over those differences. But we unite around—

“one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—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 is all of our responsibility. We are called each to make every effort to stay unified.

WRONG application is for each of us to demand these things of others. We must demand this of ourselves. Paul is not saying that we must be the enforcement arm of unity—going around: Demanding

- Humility
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Forbearance

But that we demand it of ourselves.

Corporate unity comes with GREAT effort as individuals—have the strength to be

- Humble: Considering others as most important
- Gentle: Extending kindness and courtesy
- Patience: Wait on others even if they put you out.
- Forbearance: Overlook and bear with painful faults.

Make EVERY effort.

