

An Exhortation to Spiritual Unity

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AM Service**

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Text:

Ephesians 4:1 therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2: With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4: There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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.

Introduction

In the beginning of this book the apostle Paul prays that believers would know and understand the hope of our calling, and now, he exhorts us to walk worthy of that calling. But still the question is how? Paul will help us answer that question in the next three chapters of this book. In chapters 4 through 6, Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit will tell us what walking worthy of our calling looks like. This will be the focus of our study in the coming Sundays.

Having exhorted us to walk worthy of our high and holy calling, the apostle Paul now expounds how to bring this to pass in our lives. Beginning here in chapter 4 and verse 2 and all the way through the end of this epistle, Paul tells us how to walk worthy of our calling.

Ephesians 4:1 therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2: With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3: Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4: There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are 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.

We see here, the apostle Paul stresses church unity. This is one of the clearest ways to show that believers are walking worthy of their calling. It is maintaining spiritual unity of the church. He emphasizes this in verse 3, “Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” And again, in verse 13, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith.”

If you remember, back in [Ephesians 2:11-15](#), we see that God’s grace, united and brought Jews and Gentiles together in one body, the church. The wall of separation between the Jews and the Gentiles has been broken down through the person and work of Jesus Christ. All those who believe, Jew or Gentile are now members of the same body—the church. That’s God’s plan, “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph 3:6). AMEN!

The Lord is greatly interested in the unity of the church. In His priestly prayer in [John 17](#), our Lord prays for the unity of His church throughout the ages.

[John.17:18](#) As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. [19:](#) And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. [20:](#) Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; [21:](#) **That they all may be one;** as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, **that they also may be one in us:** that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. [22:](#) And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; **that they may be one, even as we are one:**

Now, if the Lord is that interested in the unity of the church, then we should be interested in it as well. Maintaining spiritual unity in the church is so vital. It is so beneficial. In the words of King David, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” ([Psalm 133:1](#)). But the reality is that even though Jews and Gentiles were brought together in one body, there was still some tension between the Jewish and Gentile believers. Hence, the exhortation to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. And how is this to be accomplished? The apostle Paul specifies four traits or virtue that we need to develop and exercise to maintain spiritual unity of the Church, namely, **lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance.**

I - Lowliness

[Ephesians 4:1](#) therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, [2:](#) **With all lowliness** and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; [3:](#) Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Paul begins with humility, which is a virtue greatly despised in the ancient world. The Romans and Greeks did not think highly of humility. They held this virtue with contempt, because they saw humility as a characteristic of weak and coward people. They considered this Christian trait fits only for slaves. How different the Roman and the Greek view of humility from our Lord’s.

[Philippians 2:5](#) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: [6:](#) Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: [7:](#) But made himself of no reputation, and **took upon him the form of a servant**, and was made in the likeness of men: [8:](#) And being found in fashion as a man, **he humbled himself**, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

While the ancient world despise humility, we Christians should desire and pursue it, because humility is an important path to unity. This trait is critical because humility promotes unity, but pride promotes disunity. Humility brings people together; pride pulls them apart. But what is lowliness? What is humility? It is important to clarify what the Bible mean by lowliness, because there is a lot of confusion that surrounds humility. Sometimes humility is mistakenly confused with having a low view of oneself or putting oneself down. It is sometimes confused with feelings of inferiority and inability. But this is not the biblical understanding of humility. In fact, a low view of oneself is sometimes pride in disguise. Sometimes we intentionally devalue ourselves or our contributions in an attempt to appear humble.

So, what is true humility? The best definition I have ever come across is, “**to think rightly of ourselves.**” Humility is not having a low view of oneself but a proper view of oneself. It is not humility for a man to think less of himself than he ought. The apostle writes in [Romans 12:3](#), “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”

Humility is to make a right estimate of oneself. And **what is a right view of ourselves?** We are God’s creatures: small, finite, dependent, limited in intelligence and ability, prone to sin, and soon to die and face God’s judgment. But we are also God’s children: created, loved, and redeemed by God’s grace alone, not by anything in or of ourselves; and gifted by God with certain unique gifts, abilities, resources, and advantages, which are to be used for his glory.

Having a right view of God and ourselves has a great effect on our relationships with others. As I have said earlier, humility brings people together. Pride and self-interests destroy any chances of unity. But humility promotes unity and harmony in the church. This is why Paul begins with this trait as the path to unity.

II - Meekness

[Ephesians 4:2](#) With all lowliness and **meekness**, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

The next trait that the apostle Paul specifies that we need to develop and exercise to maintain spiritual unity of the church is meekness. Sadly, meekness is not celebrated in our society today. What we celebrate is the opposite of meekness which are rudeness and harshness. This is because our society considers meekness as a weakness to be avoided and rejected. But, contrary to what our society thinks, **meekness is not weakness**. There is a big difference between weakness and meekness. Let me illustrate. Imagine somebody slap you on the face and you don’t slap him back. And the reason you don’t retaliate is because you are weak and afraid. But imagine that you are trained in martial arts, and someone slaps you on the face and you don’t hit back. That’s not weakness, that’s meekness. The difference between a meek person and a weak person is that a weak person cannot do anything. But a meek person can do something but chooses not to. Meekness is power under control.

Doesn’t this remind us of our Lord?

[Luke 23:33-34](#), “And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left. Then said Jesus, **Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.** And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.”

Here is a perfect demonstration of meekness. Our Lord did not respond to insult and hurt, in anger or retaliation, instead, He responded in love and forgiveness. Our Lord is able to say in ...

[Matthew 11:28-30](#), “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

The meek person is not weak; they are Christ-like! Oh, to be Christ-like. Let us take His yoke upon us and learn of Him; for He is meek and lowly in heart. Meekness will help us maintain unity and harmony in the church.

III - Longsuffering

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and **meekness**, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

The next trait that the apostle Paul specifies that we need to develop and exercise to maintain spiritual unity of the church is longsuffering. If we would keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, we must not only develop and exercise lowliness and meekness, but also longsuffering. We must be longsuffering with one another.

It has been said that longsuffering means “**suffering long**.” The word ‘longsuffering’ comes from the Greek word *makrothymos*, which is a combination of two words, namely, *makro* and *thymos*. *Makro* means “long” and *thymos* means “temper. So, longsuffering literally means long tempered.

Longsuffering is the opposite of **short-tempered** or **having a short fuse**. It is the opposite of anger, especially of “**outbursts of wrath**”. To be long-suffering is to be able to hold back a long time before it expresses itself in action or passion. Some have defined the term as “**long on suffering**.” The person who has the spirit of longsuffering has the ability to suffer a long time under the mistreatment of others without growing resentful or bitter.

“By the way, responding with longsuffering to people who mistreat and provoke us does not mean ignoring their mistreatment and provocation as if it is not taking place. No, responding with longsuffering does not ignore the provocations of others; it simply seeks to respond to them in a godly manner. It enables us to control our tempers when we are provoked and to seek to deal with the person and his provocation in a way that tends to heal relationships rather than aggravate problems. It seeks the ultimate good of the other individual rather than the immediate satisfaction of our own aroused emotions.” - Source Unknown.

I believe we would all admit that when it comes to patience it is not a virtue that we consistently practice. As one has written:

*Patience is a virtue,
Possess it if you can,
Seldom found in a woman,
Never found in a man.*

We all could learn how to wait and be a little more patient, rather than being hasty in our actions and rash in our judgments. Impatience has often been the source of much trouble and even sorrow in our life and in the church. But exercising longsuffering will help us maintain unity and harmony in the church.

IV – Forbearance

If we are to maintain the spiritual unity of the church, we need to develop and exercise not only lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, but also forbearance.

Ephesians 4:2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

In order to maintain unity, you and I have to be able to forbear one another. Forbearing one another means putting up with one another. Why are we exhorted to forbear? Because church is made up of people with various personalities, abilities, and temperaments, and level of growth and maturity.

*To dwell above with saints we love,
O that will be glory
But to dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.*

As our church grows and add in number, the more we will have differently developed believers within the assembly, meaning the more we need to mutually forebear with one another And not only that, but also the church is made up of imperfect people, which means we can and will do things that will require forbearance, putting up with one another. Church is not for perfect people. If we are perfect, we don't need to come to Church gathering. In Heaven, we will all be perfect and so there is no need of forbearance. In Heaven you and I will be so perfect that we cannot help it but love one another all the time. But we are not there yet, that is why we need to exercise forbearance.

Forbearance is a concept which is closely linked to forgiveness. Forbearance and forgiveness are closely related.

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; 13: Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

To exercise forbearance is to be patient and to put up with each other's sins, weaknesses, annoying habits, and irritating ways. It is making allowance for each other's faults and failures, and forgiving those who offend us and hurt us. That is how God wants each of us to be, as His children, as His church. And what is it that motivates us to forebear and to forgive? It is love. It is the love of Christ compels us. It is the love of the Spirit shed abroad in our hearts which should motivates us to forebear and to forgive.

Colossians 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. 14: And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

The only way to be able to exercise forbearance and forgiveness is if the love of Christ has been shed abroad in our hearts. In **Ephesians 3:17**, the apostle has just prayed to God that his readers

might know and be rooted and grounded in love. Now he urges them to exercise forbearance and forgiveness that is rooted and grounded in God's love.

Then the apostle Paul goes on to say in [verse 3](#), "[Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.](#)" Exercising forbearance and forgiveness is not only motivated by love, but it is also enabled by the Holy Spirit. It could only be accomplished by the power of the Spirit in their lives, individually ([Ep 3:16](#)) and corporately ([Ep 2:22](#))."

Closing Exhortations

The apostle Paul stresses the importance of church unity because this is one way to show that we are walking worthy of our calling. And the path to the church unity is to exercise lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance. Every one of these qualities is vital to that unity. If we are honest, we would all admit that this is not easy to do, because these qualities are not natural to us. These are supernatural qualities and only the Holy Spirit can produce them in us.

Understand that these qualities are the product of the Holy Spirit, who lives inside every believer. The fruit of the Spirit is produced by the Spirit, not by the Christian. It is true that we are admonished to be humble and lowly, to be meek, to be longsuffering, and to forbear, but we cannot do so without the power of the Holy Spirit in us. Christian unity is a high call, and a hard call. It is impossible apart without the Holy Spirit's enablement.

Do you see now why Paul prayed for the Ephesian saints to be strengthened by the Spirit in their inner man! ([Eph 3:16ff](#)) These qualities and actions are not possible naturally, but only supernaturally! This implies that you and I must be born of the Spirit in order to have the fruit of the Spirit. There must be a work of grace in order to bear the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is not a superficial work that only changes the behavior and actions. It is a deep work on the inside that produces lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance. So, the question is, "*have you been born again?*" Have you received Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord? If not, receive Him today. The Bible says, "[But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name](#)" ([John 1:12](#)).

For those who have been born again, the question is are you growing in these qualities? Let me remind you that as natural fruit needs to be cultivated and so does spiritual fruit. It needs to be watered and fed with the Word in the soil and atmosphere of the Spirit. Let us look to Him for grace that we may grow in lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance, [endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.](#)

AMEN!