

The Communion of Saints

Delighting in God Together in 2025

3- The Unity of the Faith

Church February 2, 2025

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as also 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 over all and through all and in all.

7 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.

8 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN."

9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth?

10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes

the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

*To the Glory of God the Father; God the Son;
and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that Jesus set up one single Church. And our Lord Christ is *sovereignly* and *ongoingly* “building” that one single Church- as people, who have been chosen for Salvation since before God created the world, are born again; justified; adopted; and become “individual members” of that one single Body (**1Corinthians 12:27**). And Jesus alone is the sole “Head” of that one single Church. And because He has purchased the members of that one single Church with His own Blood- Jesus is to have the Preeminence in all that is said and done in that one single Church.

Now many people would agree with that Statement- at least on the surface. And yet- because of Unconfessed Sin and the Unwillingness of people to repent- we see that the modern visible Church on the earth is very divided; very splintered; and is engaged in almost every conceivable Activity EXCEPT the “Unity” that the Apostle infallibly spoke about in this Passage.

And so, 2,000 years after the Resurrection- we have literally tens of thousands of different religious Groups; Denominations; Systems; and Organizations- all claiming to be “*Christian*”; all claiming to believe the Bible; and all claiming to possess and to love the Truth. And that is an Abomination; and an abject Rebellion to both the tenor and spirit of Jesus’ Words in the “*High- Priestly Prayer*” found in **John 17:13-23**- where our Savior cried out to His Father and prayed,

13 "But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

15 I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

17 Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

18 As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

19 For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

20 "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

21 that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

Their Future Glory

22 "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

The fact that- as we are around 25 years into the 3rd Millennial of the “*Last Days*” or the “*Church Age*”- Believers in Jesus are so divided; so splintered; and so distant from the “*Oneness*” that Jesus prayed about here- should break our hearts. Because this Brokenness is truly the great Scandal of our Day. And it should be the Catalyst for each one of us to pray and speak and work as hard as we can to *eliminate* this horrific Division. But what is even *worse* than being divided- is that this Division is hardly ever mentioned; or talked about; much less prayed about; among Believers in the 21st Century.

Now I have been led to take a short “Vacation” from our verse-by-verse “Journey” through the **Gospel of Matthew** to begin this new year by preaching a series of Messages concerning the “*Communion of Saints*”. And part of that Series is the biblical Truth about the “Unity” of the Christian Faith. And this all-but forgotten Truth about the Unity of the Faith- is very important for us to comprehend because so many have grown used to worshipping God with their Words while denying Him in the Way they live their daily Lives.

For example, 971 years ago- the Christian Church of the *eastern* part of the Roman Empire broke away from the *western* part- over what is called, the “*Filioque*”- three words in Latin found in the Nicene Creed- concerning God the Holy Spirit:

And I believe in the Holy Ghost the Lord, and Giver of Life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son;

... those three English words, “AND THE SON” in Latin- is “*Filioque*”.

Back in the 6th Century- several of the “western” or “Latin” churches began using that phrase to describe the 3rd Person of the Trinity. The Greek speaking “eastern” churches considered that to be a theological Error; and *formally* requested that the Bishop of Rome condemn its use- as it was NOT found in the original drafts of the Nicene Creed. This Problem *continued* to escalate through the Centuries as the succeeding popes *refused* to condemn its use. The western

Church considered then as well as now- that the Filioque is biblically correct (it is)¹.

But this Issue was actually about “*Authority*”. The Patriarchs of the eastern, Greek-speaking Church taught then and still teach today that Authority rests with them; while the pope asserted then and still asserts today that, as the “*vicar of Christ*”, the pope alone has the absolute Authority to alter the Nicene Creed (or anything else) as he sees fit.

And so, in 1054AD- the pope formally and officially *ex-communicated* the “Patriarchs” of the eastern Church. And they responded by *ex-communicating* the pope. This created what is now called, the “*Great Schism*”. And that Division is now almost 1,000 years old.

463 years later- on October 31, 1517, a German Augustinian monk by the name of Martin Luther, nailed a document to the front door of the Church at Whittenberg which contained 95 Items of “Protest” against both the Theology and Practice of the Roman religious System that he saw as being patently unbiblical and even sinful. Luther thought his Action would spur a Discussion and an honest Examination of those 95 theses. Instead, that “spark of Protest” began a Process that ended with the pope *officially* and *formally* ex-communicating Luther- which was the Beginning of what we now call, the “*Protestant Reformation*”- which is now into its 508th year.

Now while there were many Issues that created and fueled that Split- there were two *titanic* Issues that rose to the Surface that *summarized* the many unbiblical Teachings of Rome:

1. Who has “*final [supreme] Authority*” to “*bind the Conscience*” of the Believer?
2. How are lost Sinners “*justified*” [forgiven and made Righteous]?

The first Issue became known as the “*Formal Cause*” of the “*Protestant Reformation*”; while the 2nd Issue was called, the “*Material Cause*”. Rome taught then and still teaches today that when the pope sits in the “throne” of St. Peter and speaks about matters of either Faith or Morals- what he says is “*Infallible*”. In other words, at that moment- the pope does NOT possess the ability to be in Error.

The 16th Century Reformers- who issued a “Protest” against Rome’s unbiblical Teachings and those who label themselves as “Protestants” today- *categorically* reject the “*Doctrine of Papal Infallibility*”. We believe and teach that it is the Scriptures ALONE that have that Authority.²

¹ John 16: 7 and 20:22; Galatians 4:6; Romans 8:9; Philippians 1:19; The Revelation 22:1

² Protestantism also requires that for the Scriptures to be “*Infallible*”- they MUST be interpreted “*rightly and fully*” because a partial or wrong Interpretation of the Scriptures is NOT Infallible at all.

500 years ago- Rome also taught and still teaches today- that lost Sinners are “forgiven and made Righteous” (Justified) through a Life-long “Process” that begins with infant Baptist (baptismal Regeneration) and extends over the entire Life of the Individual; and includes attending the Mass; partaking of Communion; and participating in the “Rite of Penance”. Protestants categorically disagree with this and believe and teach that lost Sinners are justified by Grace *alone*; through Faith *alone*; in Christ *alone*- to the Glory of God *alone*. Thus, the Division.

Now keep in mind that Protestants are NOT merely divided from Rome. We are also divided with the eastern Group over the SAME two Issues that brought about our “Protests” 500 years ago. Eastern orthodoxy *categorically* rejects “Justification by Faith alone”- which is the very “Heart and Soul” of the biblical Gospel.

Now there have been many attempts at Reconciliation over the years between the three main “Branches” of Christianity:

1. Rome
2. Orthodox
3. Protestant

... but ALL of these Efforts have eventually failed- precisely because they did NOT address the primary Issue:

**There can be NO Unity unless we agree about what we
MUST believe and teach**

... and as long as the Efforts to unify Christianity center on “Social Issues” (i.e. Abortion; sexual Immorality, etc.) and other peripheral Issues while ignoring the real Problems that caused the Divisions in the first Place (Authority/Justification)- the Efforts at Reconciliation will *continue* to fail.

What divides three main Branches of world-wide Christianity has to do with Theology and Doctrine: what the Bible teaches; and what it *means* by what it teaches. So, it is important to understand that we are NOT divided over Personalities. And we are also NOT divided over things that don’t matter. We DON’T agree on who has “final Authority”. And we also don’t agree on “how lost people are forgiven and made Righteous” (Justification). And those are weighty; and serious; and eternal Issues- that CANNOT be solved by using shallow and superficial Means or by pretending these Issues don’t exist.

For example, back in 1994- several leading Evangelicals³ joined with Leaders within the Roman religious “System” and produced a Document called,

³ Pat Robertson; JI Packer; Os Guinness; Bill Bright; Chuck Colson; and Richard Land

“*Evangelicals and Catholics Together*” (ECT). This “Movement” categorically stated that the “*Protestant Reformation*” was over; and that, because both Catholics and Protestants can honestly recite the Nicene Creed- that the 500 -year- old Division between them was resolved. This Document also stated that the Protestant, “*Sola Gratia*” (by Grace alone) was infinitely MORE important than “*Sola Fide*” (by Faith alone).

In response to this Effort- a Conference was called by theologian, John Ankerberg to discuss whether “ETC” was correct. ALL Protestant signatories were invited. NONE came. But D. James Kennedy; John MacArthur; and RC Sproul did attend.

This Group correctly stated that NOTHING had been done by the Roman religious System to either apologize; rescind; repent of; or correct the “*Anathemas*” of the Council of Trent⁴ against both the Protestants individually as well as Protestant Theology. Most notably was the “*eternal Damnation*” that was pronounced by Rome on “...anyone who believes or teaches that Justification is by Faith alone- *excluding* good and godly Works” (Sola Fide)- which is the biblical Gospel.

These men were also used by God to state that “ECT” “*attacks the very Foundation of 'absolute Truth' by Concessions to Relativism and Post-modernism, belying its Profession of joint Commitment to the Gospel, thus rendering that Gospel moot.*” They also stated, “*ECT falls lock-step into line with our Culture's minimalist Approach to Truth issues.*”⁵

We must understand, dear Friends, that at the very Moment (1563) Rome *formally and officially* agreed with the “*Anathemas*” of the Council of Trent- *specifically* concerning “*Justification by Faith alone*” (Sola Fide)- what they condemned was the biblical Gospel. And at that Moment- they CEASED to be a “Christian Church”. And from that Moment until today- they exist and operate as an “*apostate religious System*” that has *isolated* themselves from the Authority of Scripture.

Beloved, we will NEVER become unified by simply holding hands while singing, “*Tear the Walls of Division Down*”. We must face those serious Divisions head on- and fully embrace what the Word of God clearly and repeatedly teaches. And then we MUST be willing to cast off “*historic Tradition*” when it departs from the “*Divine Authority*” of Scripture.⁶ We MUST remember that the “battle Cry” of the Reformation was NOT, “*Tradition, Tradition, Tradition!*”- but “*Scripture, Scripture, Scripture!*”

⁴ The Council of Trent (1545-1563) was Rome’s official and formal Response to the Protestant Reformation

⁵ Ankerberg; Kennedy; MacArthur; Sproul (1995). “*Irreconcilable Differences: Catholics, Evangelicals, and the New Quest for Unity*”. Archived from the original on 2016-06-12. Retrieved Sep 3, 2011.

⁶ The main Reason that both Rome and Orthodoxy refuse this Course of Action is because they believe and teach that Tradition super-cedes Scripture.

But more importantly than any of that- here is what God the Holy Spirit “moved” on the Moses to write about this in **Genesis 15:6**:

Then he [Abraham] believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

... and what the Apostle Paul wrote in **Romans 4:1-13**:

1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

3 For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

7 "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED."

8 BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

So, as much as it should trouble us that Rome and the East are divided from Protestants- we MUST NOT compromise with what the Bible clearly teaches in order to have a measure of “*feel-good Unity*”- that is neither Genuine nor Eternal.

What needs to happen to fix the Division is that both the Pope of Rome as well as the Patriarchs of Constantinople should repent of teaching contrary to sacred Scripture. And they should *formally and officially* reject the “*Anathemas*” of Trent and begin to openly confess and believe that Justification is by Faith alone- absent any and all human Works.

Dear friends, the Bible absolutely COMMANDS that genuine Believers engage in Good and Godly Works. And we are sinning against God if we don't do that. Having Good Works; bearing godly Fruit; following Jesus; walking with Gode; loving Jesus- ALL of that is simply different Ways of displaying the outward and visible Sign that we have, in fact, already experienced God's Mercy and Grace in the New Birth; in being Justified; and in being Adopted.

So, the Bible teaches that ALL of our Good Works flow out from a humble and grateful heart of Love- precisely because we have ALREADY experienced the Miracle of the New Birth; been Justified; and been Adopted. So, we do NOT engage in Good Works in order to find Favor with God so He will forgive us and make us Righteous. We engage in Good and Godly Works- in response to having *already been* Justified by Grace through Faith ALONE!

Rome and the East MUST also *categorically* reject the false Teaching that the pope or the Patriarchs have “final Authority” or are Infallible. They are NOT. ONLY the Bible (rightly and fully interpreted) is Infallible.

And if they are willing to repent and concede those two huge Issues- then we will know that God the Holy Spirit is sovereignly bringing genuine biblical Unity to the Christian Church. But if they *refuse* to repent and recant- there is NO Basis for any Unity at all- other than with a few Social Issues.

So, while we may stand “shoulder to shoulder” with both eastern Orthodox and Rome- against many of the social Perversions of our Day- even to the Point of being arrested and going to jail together- we CANNOT go to Heaven with those who reject and condemn the biblical Gospel!

Those who categorically and repeatedly and proudly reject the PRIMACY of Scripture; and who embrace Qualities they have no Right to lay hold on (Infallibility)- are NOT saved. They are NOT Christians. They are NOT going to Heaven; and they are NOT our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Now I realize that I am preaching a Sermon on the “Unity of the Faith” this morning. And I also realize that some will condemn me for what I just said. But what I just said is the REASON every one of us are NOT Catholics or eastern Orthodox this morning and why we say we are “*Protestants*”.

But I am also perfectly in line with what the Holy Bible says and teaches about these Issues. So, what I just condemned was NOT individual people- but what those people believe and what they reject. They are free to repent and to believe the Bible. And I call them to that and pray they will. But what I will NOT do is to *ignore* or even *minimize* the Distinctions between us; and then pretend that we are all one big happy Family- when they *continue* to peddle false Doctrine- because we are NOT!

“But Brother Blair- can’t you just meet them half-way? Can’t we find SOME area of Commonality between us?” NOT when it pertains to Essential Truth; and how lost Sinners are justified; and who has final Authority! Because what would meeting them “half-way” look like? BY accepting two or three DIFFERENT Ways that lost Sinners can be born again; justified; and adopted? BY saying that the western Pope or the eastern Patriarchs are SUPERIOR to Scripture? BY saying that the Bible isn’t true or that it is subject to the Office of those Leaders? NEVER!

Unity- TRUE Unity will AUTOMATICALLY come AFTER there is confession of Sin; unconditional Repentance; and full Submission to the Authority of Scripture! Because we MUST agree, dear Friends, that the Leaders of those Groups do NOT have the Right to believe or teach contrary to what the Scriptures teach! And THAT is the Problem and the SOURCE of our Division! But that is precisely WHY we HAVE the Scriptures in the first place- so they will act as a Means of Grace by which God can correct ALL of us- when we fall into Error! And that Reality doesn’t change because I dress up in a colorful robe; and sit in a fancy chair; and wear a goofy hat!

Look, I *want* UNITY! I *pray* for Unity! I *cry out* for Unity! But I want REAL Unity! TRUE Unity! BIBLICAL Unity- and NOT some Façade or some “Make-Believe fairy Story”.

Okay, so what do we do? Are we doomed to ALWAYS be divided? No, both Rome and the East could repent tomorrow. But that is totally up to God to sovereignly move on them. So, we should ask God to do just that. I know in my Travels that the overwhelming majority of people I talk to don’t even think about God bringing Unity to the other two major Branches of Christianity. And that tells me that they certainly are NOT praying and asking God to bring about what Jesus prayed about in **John 17**.

So, we CAN and we SHOULD pray. But until God answers those Prayers- we do NOT have to do nothing. We should concentrate and pray and work on what we CAN do and what we CAN influence. We should never miss an Opportunity to speak out about Unity and what it will take to achieve it. And we should labor together with the other Protestant Churches here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast with which we already have a Relationship. And so, I am working very hard to join

in with them in different Efforts and to facilitate godly Fellowship. And so, I pray that this year- 2025- we will hold a joint- Conference on just what the Protestant Reformation was all about and why we are called,

“*Protestants*”- which will center on the “*Primacy of Scripture*”.

But even more specifically- we should lead the Way here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast as to what true, genuine, biblical Unity looks like- right here- among the people of the Covenant of Peace Church! And to do that- *requires* that we understand what God has said about the many “*One-Another*” verses that are found in God’s Word.

So, in **Ephesians 4:1**- the Apostle Paul gives an “apostolic Command” for ALL genuine Believers to,

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

... and then in verse 2- he told the specific Way we are to lead a Life that is worthy of the Divine Call on our Lives...

with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

... so, verse 2 tells us HOW to lead a Life that is worthy of the Call of God on our Lives. And then in verse 3- Paul ended that part of his Teaching by saying we MUST live our Lives like that by...

being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now this does NOT mean that we should try to *deserve* or *earn* God's Favor. It means that we should recognize how much our Place in God's Favor- *deserves* to receive from us. So, the Focus here is NOT on *our* Worth- but on the Worth and Value of our Calling.

Now if we go back to **Ephesians 1- 3**, we can catch a Glimpse of the Calling Paul meant.

- **1:4**, God chose us for Himself before the world was created.
- **1:5**, He predestined us to be His children- and that means Heirs of all our Father owns!
- **1:7**, He sent Christ to atone for all our Trespasses.
- **1:13**, He sealed us with His Holy Spirit to preserve us forever.
- **2:7**, He promises to spend an Eternity increasing our Joy in the immeasurable Riches of His Grace.

- **3:10**, He has given us the Mission as a Church to display His Wisdom, even to the Principalities and Powers in the heavenly Places.

... or as **1:12** says, we are chosen and predestined to live our Lives for **“the praise of his glory.”**

And then in **Ephesians 4:3**- Paul told us that the Way for us to lead a Life that is worthy of our Calling is to **“preserve the Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace.”** So, what is the kind of Unity that will bring Honor and Credit to our high Calling?

At least part of the Answer is found in verses 11–13. Here Paul says that Christ has given to the Church...

11 ... some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

... where in verse 13 he talks about something called, the...

... unity of the faith ...

... which is NOT the unity of MY Faith or YOUR Faith- as in the Gift of Faith- or our Ability to Believe- but rather the Unity of the *Christian Faith*. So, Paul was NOT talking about the “*Unity of Faith*”- as in the Fruit or Gift of Faith that God grants to individuals- but the “*Unity of THE Faith*”- which Jude said was...

... the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. (Jude 3)

... which is the *Christian Faith*.

So, we ALREADY have; an ALREADY given; ALREADY defined; ALREADY organized; and ALREADY established Faith- called, “*Christianity*”- or the “*Religion of Jesus*”. And THAT is the Faith that was...

... once for all handed down to the saints.

... which is the ONLY Faith that Jesus has anything to do with.

And that is WHY we are on a Journey in this Church to first, *re-discover* this “*once for all handed down to the Saints Faith*”- and then to

articulate it in such a Way that we comprehend what this Faith looks like in the 21st Century. And then- by the indwelling Power of the Holy Spirit- we pay that we will struggle against the Lusts of our Flesh- until we are humbly and joyfully submitted to this ALREADY ESTABLISHED “*Religion of Jesus*”- all to God’s Glory! And that is simply another Way of understanding the,

“Unity of the Spirit” or the “Unity of the Faith”

Now one Difference between verse 3 and verse 13 is that in verse 3 we are told to PRESERVE this Unity and in verse 13, we are told to ATTAIN Unity. So, in verse 3- Unity is a Reality to be PRESERVED while in verse 13 it is a Goal to be ATTAINED.

Now there are NOT two different kinds of Christian Unity- but that this one, single Unity has- in one sense- ALREADY been accomplished; and- in another sense- it is yet to be accomplished. Look at **Ephesians 2:13-16**:

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,

15 by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace,

16 and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity.

This Passage tells us that, in a sovereign and decisive Act of both Atonement and Reconciliation- Jesus Christ has ALREADY made every genuine Believer- “ONE”. And so, that which Jesus alone accomplished on the Cross- we should PRESERVE by the Spirit. But in another sense- the Unity that Jesus has ALREADY bought and paid for- and the Unity that He alone has ALREADY *guaranteed* with His Blood- must now be “*lived out*” in our daily Lives and brought to “*complete Reality*” in the Lives of the people of the Covenant of Peace Church. And so, in that sense- the Unity that has ALREADY been paid for- is still a Goal to be ATTAINED.

Now what that means is that IF the “Unity” that is spoken of in **Ephesians 2:13–16**; and again in 4:3; and yet again in 4:13- is the SAME Unity (which it is)- then we can now define it. So, according to what God the Holy Spirit spoke

through the Apostle Paul about Unity in **Ephesians**- this amazing and somewhat elusive Unity involves three things that we should ALREADY have in common.

Ephesians 4:13 speaks about the “*Unity of the Faith*”- which Paul then defined as being,

... the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

... so, this talks about the “*Common Convictions*” that ALL genuine Believers ALREADY possess about Jesus Christ. So, it is the “*Common Confidence*” that ALL genuine Believers ALREADY have in Jesus Christ!

And then **Ephesians 2:14** speaks about the End of Hostility- the Death of the Enmity- that existed between us and God- BEFORE God graciously imposed on us the Miracle of the New Birth. And Paul said this Enmity- this Hostility was replaced with Love.

And so, when that happens- when the Enmity is put to Death- and when this Hostility is replaced with Love- we now have a “*Common Bond*”- a “*Common Care*”- a “*Common Covenant*” that ALREADY exists for each other!

Therefore, I would define “*Christian Unity*” or the “*Unity of the Spirit*” or the “*Unity of the Faith*” from **Ephesians 2–4** as every genuine Believer having “*Common Convictions*” about Jesus Christ; “*Common Confidence*” in Jesus Christ- which automatically produces a “*Common Bond*” or a “*Common Care*” or a “*Common Covenant*” for each other. And **Ephesians 4:3** calls this the “*Unity of the Spirit*”.

So, it is the Holy Spirit Himself- Who frees our hearts from irrational, self-defensive Prejudices and Biases- so that we are both willing and able to fully embrace true *Convictions* (biblical) about Jesus Christ (**1Corinthians 2:14-16**). It is God the Holy Spirit- Who enables us to hope in God; and to have Faith in Jesus; and to cry out to God with *Confidence*, “*Abba, Father*” (**Romans 8:15&16**)! And it is God the Holy Spirit- Who bears the Fruit of Love in each of our Lives and establishes in ALL of us- that “*Common Bond*”; that “*Common Care*” and that “*Common Covenant*” for each other (**Galatians 5:22**)!

So, our “*Common Convictions; Confidence; and Covenant*” are ALL from God the Holy Spirit. And that is why Paul called it the “*Unity of the Spirit*” (v. 3)!

Now when we go back to verse 2 to see *how* we PRESERVE this Unity- we see the “*Two Stages of Love*”. And neither of these Stages is natural or normal to Human Nature. Both are the precious Fruit of the Work of the Spirit in our Lives. Let's look at each one briefly.

1. Humility and Gentleness

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness ...

The Knowledge of our high Calling should make us feel very humble. Christian Humility is a Disposition to think *lowly* of ourselves and *highly* of Jesus Christ. Christian Gentleness is the Demeanor of the person- who is actually Humble. So, precisely because they have been granted the incredible Privilege of knowing, loving, and enjoying God forever- the genuine Believer is someone of great Humility. They regard their own Knowledge and Strength as small and lowly because they have beheld the Glory of God in the Person (Face) of Jesus Christ.

They regard their own personal Righteousness as small and lowly because they have encountered the Holy One of Israel. And since the true Christian is oriented on God and not Man, they are not puffed up by any supposed Superiority they may temporarily have over other humans. If an ant would measure himself by the Freedom Tower in New York- he would NEVER boast over the flea.

Christian Humility causes a person to feel awkward receiving any Praise. It makes him recoil from the contemporary Counsel of Self-assertiveness; Self-esteem; and Self-confidence. The great Delight of the lowly Christian is to enjoy and celebrate the free, unmerited Mercy of God. Because of this Humility- all his Longings are satisfied in God. *God* is the One he esteems. *God* is his Confidence. *God* is the One Who will assert Himself someday to vindicate the "Poor in Spirit" and to "make the Last- first". In the meantime, the humble Believer is the Servant of all. This is the first stage of Love, and it is the Work of the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to see the Majesty of God's Holiness and the Minuteness of ourselves!

2. Patience and Tolerance

... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called... with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,

The second Stage of Love results from the First. It is called "Patience". And that means that Humility is the prerequisite of Patience. Haughty, prideful, and arrogant people are NOT patient. The more highly you think of *yourself*- the more quickly you will think you should be served- rather than become the Servant. So, human Pride is the foundational Enemy of Unity.

But if you have a Disposition of Humility- it won't feel so inappropriate when you are not treated like a Dignitary; and when the Fruits of your Labors are

slow in coming. If you have ever one time- seen the Majesty of God's Holiness- you are fully aware of your own Minuteness and abject Sinfulness- and you will NOT presume to deserve Special Treatment. And if you have ever one time- seen the Magnificence of God's Grace- you know that God will give you the Strength to wait- and will turn all your Delays into strategic Maneuvers of Victory!

Another way of describing the results of Humility is with the term, "Tolerance". "... walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called... with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, But biblical Tolerance is NOT that warped and perverted thing we see out in the lost and pagan World- where everything EXCEPT Divine Truth is supposed to be accepted. Biblical Tolerance is best understood as "Enduring". So, just like Gentleness is the Demeanor of Humility- Endurance is the Demeanor of Patience. And that is our *first* "one another".

Now, personally, I am thrilled that Paul said we must "endure one another". Because that *frees* me from the hypocritical Notion to think that I, or anyone else in this Church, is Sinless. Because Sinless people don't need to be endured or forgiven (**Colossians 3:13**). Yet we do! Often! So, Paul was NOT naïve. He knows that there are people here at the Covenant of Peace Church- who are grumpy, critical, unreliable, and finicky. He knows the Pastor has gaping Holes in the fabric of his own Sanctification. So, his Counsel to us- is NOT how perfect people can live together in Unity- but how real, imperfect, genuine Believers can PRESERVE the Unity of the Spirit- by *enduring* each other in Love!

We must understand that the focus in verses 2 and 3 is NOT so much on how to PRESERVE our "Common Convictions" or our "Common Confidence". Those are assumed. The Focus in those verses is on how a Group of imperfect people can preserve a "Common Covenant" that ALREADY exists with each other- precisely because we have ALL experienced the Miracle of the New Birth!

But how do we care about someone- who has NOTHING in common with us- except the Fact that he is a covenant Brother or Sister? How do we patiently endure the Ways of a person- who lives his Life so differently than we do? How do we resist the Temptation to politely nod our head at them on Sunday Morning and then ignore them the rest of the week?

Paul's Answer: be humble in spirit- so that you can patiently endure their Differences and their Sins. A man of godly Humility is *keenly* aware of the Immensity of his *own* Debt toward God; and how he has *dishonored* God- *repeatedly*- through Unbelief and Disobedience. He is also *keenly* aware of God's amazing Grace that has forgiven and saved a wretch like me!

Therefore, the primary Key to this patient Enduring- that leads to biblical Unity- is Humility. Because the man of Humility CANNOT easily or quickly retaliate when he is wronged. He knows that before God- he doesn't deserve

anything better, and he knows that if he returns Evil for Evil- he would be saying to God, "*You were a Fool for being patient with me and enduring my Sin and returning Good for my Evil.*" And that would bring far more Disgrace and Discredit upon our high Calling than the homosexual Prostitute brought upon the Harrison County District Court last week.

So, if we hope to actually obey all of those "*one-another*" verses that we see all through the Bible- we MUST guard our Hearts and *resist* the natural Inclination of our fallen Flesh- to be puffed up. And we must sincerely cry out to God- that we may be both Humble and Gentle. And that our Lord Christ would be Good to us- to bathe us with both the Desire and Ability to NOT be Impatient or Resentful with each other- but Patient and willing to Endure. Then the blessed Unity that Jesus Christ died to create- will become Real in our Church- and we will NOT bring any Disrepute upon the great God who called us into His Kingdom and Glory!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your Pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

