

How We Get Along

Upon This Rock, Part 8

Ephesians 4:1-6

One of the most enjoyable things I get to experience as a pastor is to teach a class for new members. In fact, only in the past couple of years have I begun to meet personally with every class member – one couple or single at a time; which during this current GreenHouse came to around 75 appointments; I have treasured this time – it gives me an opportunity to get to know them better – hear their background and their understanding of the gospel.

If you're new around here, we call that class, the GreenHouse – a place where biblical roots are encouraged to deepen, and spiritual growth occurs.

It's always amazing to me to see the variety of backgrounds and history of so many people now coming together as one Family. And this GreenHouse has been no different.

Some of them come from a long line of believers, while others have only recently come to faith – in fact, some of them have come to believe in Christ alone during this semester.

Some come from churches that had little concern for doctrine while others come from churches that took a doctrinal stand.

Some come from churches where there was a high level of liturgy and predictability while others come from churches that were spontaneous and not structured at all.

Some of the men in class this semester have served as teaching elders and know the scriptures very well – but others are new to the faith and are only now getting to know their Bible – from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Maps.

Some are mature in the Lord, and others are brand-new, infant believers.

We have students in this class from Eastern Europe, from the Philippines, from China, from South America . . . from Louisiana – that's a foreign country too.

We have people who've moved here directly from Maryland, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Florida, Michigan, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, California, Louisiana and Virginia.

And here they landed by the grace of God in this assembly with you native North Carolinians – all 7 of you.

And they came from all kinds of denominational backgrounds – now embracing the doctrine of the scriptures we hold dear.

They've come from all kinds of churches and styles of worship; some of them came from southern gospel backgrounds; others came from high church formal liturgy – some from band driven music styles – some people in the class are waiting for us to finally break out the banjos . . . they're hoping and praying we get with it!

Some of the class have wanted more music, others have wanted longer sermons – okay, I made that up.

I'm guessing there.

We have a large number of college students in this class– the largest group ever – which is exciting to see college students not less committed to the church, but so committed to the church they want to become an active part of it.

We have students from NC State . . . students from Meredith . . . they are joining other students in here who come from UNC – we have a number of students from Wake Tech; we even have some students in here from Duke – no church is perfect.

This is amazing to me – and I love to see the Lord do this every year – there are so many backgrounds represented . . . so many histories . . . so many cultures! How do we make it together?

How do we ever hope to get along?!

Have you ever thought about the fact that one of the greatest testimonies – of the gospel – to our world, is that we do!

The gospel of Jesus Christ is able to bind together dissimilar people – dissimilar backgrounds – dissimilar tastes – dissimilar cultures – into a fellowship of genuine and profound unity.ⁱ

You see, there's a vast difference between unity and uniformity. Uniformity is the only thing the world knows about, and there is incredible pressure from culture and fashion to make everybody just like everybody else; uniformity is the result of pressure outside us.

But unity is the result of the gospel at work inside us; unity is the product of sharing the same Spirit of God.ⁱⁱ

In fact, one of the biblical promises the church member makes to the rest of the church body is related to preserving and protecting and promoting our unity in Christ.

We've been covering these past several sessions, the promises we're making to one another; in fact, today in the lobby we have a rough draft of our new constitution and bylaws, ready for you to pick up and begin to read through.

By the way, even though we've just completed one of the largest GreenHouse classes in our history, we've had a number of people respond to this series on the church and say they'd like to join us – we're thinking of teaching the class again this Spring; we're also now offering the class through live video streaming that we archive for those with work conflicts. If you're interested in more information, see me after the service or call the church office.

One of the promises you'll find is the one we want to cover today: as members, **we are promising to submit to one another, striving for peaceful unity and harmony in the assembly.**

There are a number of passages on this subject simply because this has always been a need and it has always been a critical target of the enemy of the church.

In one way or another, the Apostles exhorted and challenged each local church to whom they wrote letters, to preserve and promote and protect the unity of their local church.

And the truth remains to this day – listen, Satan today doesn't try to destroy most churches through some deviant doctrine; he's going to try and destroy this church and every gospel-believing church by attempting to divide it and dis-unify it. Satan doesn't overtly try to destroy the church – he simply joins it – and then divides it from within.

The Apostle Peter stressed this issue by writing in his first letter, **Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another . . . be compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3:8).**

Paul warned the Galatian church – **But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another (Galatians 5:15).**

In other words, a divisive spirit will in the end consume you.

No wonder Paul exhorted the local church in Ephesus to protect **the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)**

In fact, turn there to **Ephesians 4** – Paul will expand on this issue by helping the church understand what it is that promotes true and genuine unity in the Spirit.

As we go through a few of these verses, I want to point out what we can easily identify as ingredients of genuine unity.

Paul will effectively give us at least 4 of them.

Let's start at **verse 1. I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.**

In other words, match your walk to the fact that you have been called out of the darkness and into a marvelous light as those who've been brought from death unto life.

And what I find really interesting here is that Paul will inform us that measuring up to our calling isn't discovered by how we treat the world or how we treat our family members or how we treat ourselves – it's identified in how we treat each other in the church.

Here are the ingredients, which prove we are genuinely interested in the unity of the church;

1. The first ingredient you need to mix into the recipe of genuine unity is humility.

Notice verse 2 – with all humility; you could translate that, *Be completely humble.*

This is really nothing more than the heartbeat of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱⁱ

His attitude of humility was striking. And it was to be imitated – remember – Philippians 2 – have this attitude in you which was also in Christ Jesus – He humbled Himself.

This is the fundamental heartbeat of Christianity – and it was significantly different than the heartbeat of the Roman Empire.

To the ancient Greeks and Romans, humility was considered a slave-like quality. They considered great men to be those who were self-sufficient and self-assured and self-promoting.^{iv}

Humility has always been politically incorrect.

When Augustine the great theologian of the late fourth century was asked to list the three most important principles of the Christian life, he replied, “Number 1: Humility; Number 2: Humility; Number 3: Humility.”^v

2. Paul adds next the ingredient of *gentleness*.

You could translate this, meekness.

But keep in mind, the New Testament idea of *meekness* was not weakness – it was power under control.

In fact, the word was used during Paul’s day for war horses that had been trained to respond instantly to the command and touch of the warrior. These stallions were described with this same word – gentle or meek – their strength was under control.^{vi}

Jesus described Himself with this same word when He referred to himself as *gentle/meek and humble in heart (Matthew 11:29)*. The meekness of Jesus Christ was demonstrated over and over again by the fact that he had the Divine power to retaliate and strike back – He had all authority to do as He pleased for Himself, but He never served Himself.^{vii}

He was the epitome of power under control.

Disunity in the church is most often tied to a lack of humility and the ensuing determination to gain or display some sort of power or influence over others.

Do you want unity in the church? Stir in the ingredients of humility and gentleness.

3. Paul adds another ingredient in verse 3, *with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love*.

He couples patience with forbearance. This word *forbearance* refers to being patient with other people while being provoked.^{viii}

So you need to notice that Paul here doesn’t just say that we’re supposed to patient – but we’re to be patient with love; we’re not just supposed to put up with people – we are to put up with people in love.

So, when we’re not treated like we think we ought to be treated – when people don’t respond like we think they ought to respond – here’s the question – do we care more about the unity of the church or ourselves?

What matters more?

Dwight Pentecost told the story of a church split that was so serious each side ended up filing law suits to dispossess the others from the church, completely disregarding the Biblical injunction not to settle church disputes in secular courts. Eventually, the case was decided, and the losing faction left the church and started their own in the area. Dwight Pentecost wrote that in the court proceedings it was discovered that the conflict had actually begun at a church dinner when an older, well known member of the church was given a smaller slice of ham than the person seated next to him. That started it all.^{ix}

It’s one thing to show patience toward people with a bad attitude; it’s another thing to show patience toward people with a spirit of love.

It gets back to the question of how much we care about the unity of the body.

Do we care enough to be slighted; to keep our power under control; to be hurt and provoked and respond in love?

If you’re like me, after just learning a few things about this list of ingredients, you’re probably feeling a little guilty and thinking, I guess I really ought to try a little harder.

And right here, Paul encourages that by writing – *verse 3. Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

4. This is the fourth ingredient; *being diligent – literally, making every effort – in fact, it carries the idea of hurrying – to make haste – to tackle this with a sense of urgency.*^x

By the way, don’t miss the fact that nowhere here does Paul tell us that *we* actually create unity. We don’t . . . in fact . . . we can’t.

We don’t create unity – the Spirit of God creates unity – we’re just supposed to be energetically and

diligently preserve it – you could translate this – *guard it; keep it; maintain it.*

To belong to a local church is to make up your mind that you're not as important as other people – you're effectively following the commands of the Apostles and promising one another that you will be the person who will be quick to protect the unity of the assembly – instead of being quick to divide – or gossip – or provoke – you will be eager to hasten every situation toward a unifying resolution.

Donald Grey Barnhouse once wrote of a missionary statesman who had just sort of ransacked the New Testament, compiling a list of things that disunified the body, and those things that unified the body.

Here were the things that brought disunity and division – I'll just read quickly his list of more than 20 activities that divide:

- Self-seeking
- A pharisaical spirit
- Playing God for others
- Hypocrisy
- Failing to appreciate others' gifts
- Lack of patience
- Not sympathizing with others' infirmities
- Evil speaking
- Assuming, without grounds, that others are at fault
- Suspecting the motives of another
- A domineering spirit
- A rebellious spirit
- Snobbery
- Hatred
- Grumbling
- Arguing
- Murmuring
- Maliciousness
- Being nosy
- Greediness
- Bitterness
- Resentment
- Instability
- Timidity
- Spite
- Laziness
- Economic freeloading
- Lying
- Slander
- Jealousy

- Thinking too highly of oneself
- A critical spirit
- Encouraging controversy

Thirty-three ways to chip away at the unity of the body.

This same individual went through the New Testament and made a list of activities that unified the church:

- Willingness to be in subjection to others
- Considering others better than ourselves
- An understanding spirit
- A close relationship with Christ
- Not insisting on our rights
- Willingness to confess a wrong spirit
- Sincerity
- Generosity
- Hospitality
- A sympathetic spirit
- Trusting others
- Having expectations in Christ, not in others
- Joyfulness
- Prayer
- Tactful caution
- A critical spirit towards oneself
- Christ-centeredness
- Love, in word and deed
- Fair and honest dealing with others
- Integrity
- Recognizing one's place as the assignment of God
- A forgiving spirit
- Avoiding arguments over confusing issues
- Refusing any kind of disorderly conduct
- Conscientiousness
- Faithfulness
- Being responsible to perform assignments
- Not misusing authority over others
- Being willing to follow those in authority over us
- A gentle and quiet spirit
- Humility
- Using our gifts for one another
- Remembering our own mistakes and not the mistakes of others^{xi}

These are the ingredients that maintain unity.

If the Spirit creates it, and we want to preserve it – we will obviously need to walk in the Spirit and

allow the Spirit to convict us when we bring disunity rather than unity.

You see, we're promising that in here:

- The white collar will associate with the blue collar;
- The Mexican will get along with the Puerto Rican;
- The Chinese will serve with the Taiwanese;
- The white man will share in ministry with the black man;
- The doctor and the mechanic will sing together in worship;
- The home-schooler and the public school teacher will care about each other;
- The business woman will invite a mother of 5 to share a cup of coffee;
- The old man will delight in the company of young men;
- The single adult will appreciate the marriage conference;
- The empty nesters will help serve our children;
- The PhD'r will be taught in Sunday school by a college drop-out
- The well-known will love to fellowship with the unknown.

Paul effectively says do you want to pursue that by which you should be identified?

A local church demonstrating that which binds the universal church – *verse 4 – one body; one Spirit, one hope of your calling; verse 5; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.*

Unity!

One . . . one . . . one . . . one . . . one.

We don't all have the same personality or penchant or particularity or persona – but we have the same purpose – and we follow the same Person – our chief Shepherd, who through Paul effectively says here, “Whatever you do, don't slack up – don't slow down – don't stray away from preserving and protecting the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The only way we'll ever maintain this course is to mix these ingredients of our unity with these truths that form our unity and bind us together – *one Spirit; one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father who is over all* of us, effectively living in us and through us.

Surrendered and sensitive to our Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ.

Our youngest daughter moved into an apartment some time ago and with her went our last dog, Pixie. She wanted to keep Pixie when she moved, and I said, “Yes . . . please . . . yes!”

One of the problems with Pixie is that she doesn't bark, she howls – a lamenting, piercing howl that resembles a siren.

It wasn't long before people in the apartment complex began to complain whenever Charity went to work – evidently Pixie would just howl all day long.

So Charity had to start bringing Pixie over to our house during the day . . . she had tried everything . . . nothing worked . . . she really didn't know what to do with Pixie.

I suggested death . . . that didn't go over well.

And then she read about a special collar that delivers a light shock when the dog barks. We ordered it and within 5 minutes, it worked. I mean it worked . . . and Pixie has almost *forgotten* how to bark.

It's amazing how technology can solve some really big problems.

My neighbor down the street recently put up one of those electric, underground fences. Little white flags were placed where the line ran underground near the street. I saw my neighbor out there a few months ago walking his little dog up to the line – I knew exactly what was happening in that training session.

And I hoped it would work for him.

It reminded me how several years ago, one of the kids in the neighborhood knocked on our door, holding a Bassett hound puppy that needed a home. We already had Patches – who would eventually deliver Pixie.

We really didn't have room for another dog.

But these kids were desperate . . . and that little Bassett hound puppy needed a home; I should have never answered the door; but in a moment of insanity . . . I said yes.

We buried one of those invisible fences in our backyard. We set up the little white flags along the line. That special collar came equipped with a beeper and metal studs. If Murphy, our Bassett hound, came close to that line that collar would begin to beep . . . and the beeping sound would get faster and faster as he neared the line – and then, if he got too close to the line, he'd get a shock – he'd

yelp and retreat. We went through the process a couple of times so Murphy could connect the dots.

You could set the shock level at different levels.

Now for Patches – our female, it worked really well. For Murphy . . . he just didn't get it. Even when he was fully grown, he still didn't get it. If he saw another dog or a cat or a jogger, Murphy would run toward that line – I watched him do it time and time again – he'd run and never even slow down – he'd just yelp as he crossed the line and kept running. I'd get him, drag him back over the line and he'd yelp again.

I finally decided to set the power at the highest level. It had the same power as an electric chair . . . the lights in the neighborhood would dim every time Murphy crossed the line.

It didn't make any difference.

I finally figured out that Murphy wasn't dumb – he just didn't care . . . he'd rather chase what he wanted more than anything else in the world – even though it hurt!

Wouldn't it be great if every Christian had a special collar – small enough not to be noticed, but whenever we got ready to bark or howl – we get a little shock.

Wouldn't it be great if we had a collar that beeped at us – warning us – it would beep at you when you got to close to the line – making some sinful decision or perhaps add to something that

would hurt . . . something that would discourage or divide the church.

If we just had something to guide us – well, Paul writes in *verse 7*. ***But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.***

In other words, we have all been given grace – we know better. Now live by it; demonstrate it as you mix the ingredients of unity into the life of the assembly – a place where every believer has been given the grace of God.

In fact, look over at *verse 29* where Paul summarizes, ***Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear . . . 31. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with malice – Paul is writing this to the church! Verse 32. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.***

That's the measure of His gift to you. And the point includes this: God has given each of us enough grace for us to be able to give grace back to each other.

So this is our obvious promise – to submit in humility to one another, striving for peaceful unity and gracious harmony in the assembly.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 11/15/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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- i John MacArthur, Romans: Volume 2 (Moody Press, 1994), p. 273
ii Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Joyful (Victor Books, 1978), p. 49
iii Sam Gordon, Philippians: An Odyssey of Joy (Ambassador, 2004), p. 72
iv Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Ephesians (Crossway, 1990), p. 122
v Gordon, p. 76
vi Max Anders, Holman New Testament Commentary: Volume 8 (Holman Reference, 1999), p. 148
vii Adapted from Hughes, p. 123
viii Adapted from Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament (Regency, 1976), p. 530
ix Adapted from Hughes, p. 123
x Hughes, p. 125
xi Donald Grey Barnhouse, Romans: Volume 4 (Eerdmans, 1964), p. 21