Love That Builds Unity (From Division to One Body)

Love In Action

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Sermon: Love In Action: Love That Builds Unity (From Division to One Body)

Sermon Text

Ephesians 4:1–6 (KJV)[1] I 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:

Throughout this series, *Love In Action*, we have discovered that love is more than an emotion we experience; it is a spiritual responsibility we demonstrate.

- **Love That Serves:** From Self-Centered to Servant-Centered.
- **Love That Gives:** From Receiving a Blessing to Being a Blessing.
- **Love That Forgives:** From Grudges to Grace.
- **Love That Restores:** From Condemnation to Compassion.
- **Love That Builds Unity:** From Division to One Body.

Each of these expressions of love brings us to a greater spiritual objective. When we learn to serve one another, give to one another, forgive one another, and restore one another, we create an environment in which we can become one with one another.

How many of you have experienced deep-seated conflicts between yourself and a family member, friend, co-worker, or even a brother or sister in Christ?

One of the greatest threats to the body of Christ is not necessarily the opposition that comes from outside of the church, but the division that develops inside of the church.

We allow differences in personalities, preferences, perspectives, positions, and personal experiences to separate people whom God has spiritually joined together.

The problem is not that we are different; the problem is that we allow our differences to become divisions.

Unity does not mean uniformity. Uniformity requires everyone to be alike; unity allows people who are different to operate together for a common purpose. Melting Pot vs. Salad Bowl!

In the first three chapters of Ephesians, we learn how God has reconciled two historically divided groups, Jews and Gentiles, together into one spiritual body.

Ephesians 2: [14] For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*;

Now, Paul is teaching us in this 4th chapter how to walk in the oneness of this reconciliation.

Ephesians 4: [1] I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

We must stop separating ourselves, rebuilding walls of division that Christ has broken down.

The 6 verses of our lesson text reveal three spiritual responsibilities that enable us to do this: The Practice of Humility, the Preservation of Harmony, and the Promotion of Oneness.

God's love enables us to move beyond our personal differences and conflicts to embrace our common identity in Christ. And the evidence that is working is not simply how well we relate to those who are like us, but how well we remain connected to those who are different from us!

Series and Sermon: Love In Action: Love That Builds Unity (From Division to One Body)

(The Disposition of Unity, The Discipline of Unity, and the Doctrine of Unity)

I. Disposition of Unity (Practice Humility)

Ephesians 4: [1] I 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;

Before we can experience unity in our relationships, we must develop the spiritual disposition within ourselves that makes unity possible.

Disposition here means our Nature, Character, or Temperament

To be worthy of our vocation and spiritual calling means that God's Love should be reflected in our personal conduct. We cannot claim to have a relationship with Christ while consistently demonstrating attitudes that destroy our relationships with one another.

First, we must live with lowliness and meekness. Lowliness is humility; Meekness is strength under control – Exercising restraint even when we have the power to respond differently.

One of the greatest contributors to division is pride. It makes everything about our opinions, our preferences, and our positions. Sometimes our conflicts are not about what they did wrong, but our unwillingness to humble ourselves when we believe we are right.

Next, Paul teaches us we must have long suffering, the spiritual capacity to exercise patience with people who have not yet developed, matured, or changed.

We want people to understand our struggles, but we refuse to understand theirs.

Finally, we must learn to forbear one another in love. This is the willingness to accommodate the imperfections and differences of others without allowing them to destroy the relationship.

It does not mean tolerating abuse, excusing sin, or abandoning accountability. It means that every imperfection does not have to become an offense, dispute or division.

Philippians 2:3–4 Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

- Everybody does not have to think like me for me to love them.
- Everybody does not have to agree with me for me to respect them.
- Everybody does not have to be like me for me to be connected to them.
- I don't have to diminish somebody else's importance to establish my own significance.

Unity begins when I stop demanding that everybody else change and start allowing God to change me!

II. Discipline of Unity (Preserve Harmony)

Ephesians 4: [3] Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Discipline here means Self-control or Self-restraint.

Unity is a spiritual work accomplished by God, but maintaining that unity is a spiritual responsibility entrusted to us.

The word *endeavouring* here communicates intentional effort and a sense of urgency.

Unity is not something that we casually hope will happen. It is something that we must intentionally work to maintain.

We are not told to create unity; we are told to maintain or keep it. The Holy Spirit has already united believers through Christ. Our responsibility is to protect it.

The enemy understands that if he cannot destroy us individually, he can weaken us collectively by dividing us relationally.

Mark 3:25 And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand.

Division often begins with something small: an unresolved offense, an unchecked assumption, an unnecessary conversation, or an unaddressed misunderstanding.

What begins as a personal disagreement can eventually become a collective disruption when we involve people who were never part of the original problem.

We must learn to address conflicts rather than accumulate them, resolve misunderstandings rather than repeat them, and reconcile relationships rather than recruit people to take sides.

Romans 14:19 Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

And how should we maintain unity? Through the bond of peace.

A bond is something that holds things together; glue! Peace is the relational glue that helps us to remain connected even when we experience conflict.

Peace is not necessarily the absence of disagreement; it is the presence of a commitment that prevents disagreement from becoming destruction.

Romans 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

We cannot control everybody else's behavior, but we can take responsibility for our own. Stop repeating what you should be resolving.

- Stop spreading what you should be settling.
- Stop recruiting people to your side and start bringing people together.
- Stop allowing temporary disagreements to create permanent divisions.

If God brought us together, we should not allow our pride, our preferences, or our personal conflicts to pull us apart!

III. Doctrine of Unity (Promote Oneness)

Ephesians 4: [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.

By Doctrine, we mean Dogma, Guideline, Rule, or Creed.

Our unity is not based upon our similarities, our common identity and purpose.

Seven times we see the word *one*.

- One Body: We share a spiritual connection.
- One Spirit: We share a spiritual empowerment.
- One Hope: We share an eternal expectation.
- One Lord: We share a common authority.
- One Faith: We share a foundational belief.
- One Baptism: We share a public identification with Christ.
- One God and Father: We share a divine origin and spiritual family.

Paul is reminding us that what connects us spiritually is greater than what separates us naturally.

We may have different personalities, different backgrounds, different experiences, different gifts, and different responsibilities, but we belong to the same body.

1 Corinthians 12:12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.

God never intended for our differences to destroy our unity. He designed our differences to contribute to our collective strength.

The diversity of the body is not a defect; it is a divine design.

1 Corinthians 12:21 And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

When we understand our spiritual identity, we stop competing with one another and start complementing one another. We stop trying to establish our own importance and start contributing to our collective purpose.

The body grows when every member contributes. The body becomes stronger when every member is connected. The body fulfills its purpose when every member operates in love.

- We have different gifts, but we serve the same God.
- We have different assignments, but we advance the same Kingdom.
- We have different functions, but we fulfill the same purpose.
- We have different testimonies, but we have been redeemed by the same blood.

We don't have to be identical to be inseparable. We don't have to be alike to be aligned. We don't have to be the same to be one!

Conclusion: Together We Are Stronger

As we conclude this series, *Love In Action*, we must understand that everything we have learned about love leads us toward becoming the body of Christ that God intended us to be.

- When love serves, selfishness is defeated.
- When love gives, needs are supplied.
- When love forgives, offenses are released.
- When love restores, broken lives are repaired.
- And when love builds unity, the body of Christ becomes stronger!

Psalm 133:1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

When we come together, our individual strengths can compensate for our individual weaknesses.

We are taught in **Ecclesiastes 4:9–12, that two is better than one – We pick each other up, we warm each other up, and we back each other up.**

The enemy wants us isolated: Isolation makes us vulnerable, division diminishes our strength, and disconnection disrupts our purpose.

Jesus understood that our unity would become a testimony to the world.

John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

When we worship together, we become stronger! When we serve together, we become stronger! When we stand together, we become stronger!

One body! One Spirit! One Lord! One faith! One baptism! One God and Father of us all!

Unity is not the elimination of our differences; it is the demonstration of a love that is greater than our differences.

Midweek Study Lesson Plan (Sermon: Love That Builds Unity (From Division to One Body))

Lesson Text

- **Primary Text: Ephesians 4:1–6**
- **Supporting Texts: Colossians 3:12–13; Romans 14:19; 1 Corinthians 12:12–14**

Sermon Outline

- **I. Disposition of Unity (Practice Humility)**
- **II. Discipline of Unity (Preserve Harmony)**
- **III. Doctrine of Unity (Promote Oneness)**

Questions: (What was your main takeaway from this message?)

I. Getting To Know "Me"

1. What is one memory from this year you want to hold onto?

2. Is it okay to put up Christmas decorations before Thanksgiving?

II. Into The Bible

1. Read Ephesians 4:1–3. Why does Paul identify himself as "the prisoner of the Lord," and how does this connect to his instructions to the church?

2. Read Ephesians 3:4–6 and 4:4–6. What does Paul reveal about God's plan for Jews and Gentiles, and how does this help explain his teaching about unity in chapter 4?

III. Life Application

1. Which of the three traits listed by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-3 as supporting unity do you need God's help to grow in right now? A. Humility B. Patience or C. Bearing with one another

2. What practical effort does it take on your part to keep the unity of the Spirit in your home, church, or friend group?