

Citizens & Saints
Unity • Message 7
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Prayer Points for Prayer Time:

- Teach us to pursue peace and build one another up.
- Pray for unity in a particular relationship and for our church.
- Raise up a church in which every part does its work.

Worship Psalm:

"The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection."

Psalm 18:2a (NLT)

Scripture Reading:

There will not be a Scripture Reading this week.

A. Introduction

Unity is a word that many in this room and around the world are familiar with. It sounds pretty easy. Until people get involved.

It is easy to talk about unity when everyone thinks like you, prefers what you prefer, votes the way you vote, worships the way you worship, and sees every issue the way you see it.

That's not unity. That is similarity.

Unity is where people who are genuinely different are brought together by something greater than their differences. That is what the gospel does.

For the first 3 chapters of Ephesians, Paul has been explaining what God has done for us in Christ. We were dead, and God made us alive. We were far away, and we have been brought near by Jesus. People who were divided are now reconciled.

Jew and Gentile are being brought together into a new humanity. Then we get to Ephesians 4, and Paul says: *Live like that is true!*

Paul moves from belief to practice. Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians are the why of the gospel.

Chapter 4 begins by giving us how to live this out.

If Jesus has made us one, how do we live like one? Paul is going to show us in our passage that unity is not passive. The church does not display the power of the gospel because we are the same; we display the power of the gospel when people who would otherwise have no reason to belong to one another are transformed by Jesus and learn to live as one body.

B. Unity

1. WALK in unity.

(Ephesians 4:1-2. C/R: Galatians 5:16-26)

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:1-2 (NIV)

When Paul urges the Ephesians to “walk”, he is talking specifically about the way in which they live their life. Paul regularly uses the word *walk* to describe the picture of a Christian’s whole manner of life. Being a Christian is not just about something you believe in; it is something you actually live as.

Paul says to walk in a manner worthy of the calling you have received.

Worthy is not about earning the call of God. Paul, in Ephesians 1-3, makes that abundantly clear. We were dead in sin, and God made us alive in Christ. We are saved by grace. Those who were outside are brought inside by God. Jew and Gentile are being made into one new humanity.

Paul isn’t saying, *Live like this so God will call you*. He is saying, *Because God has called you, live in a way that fits that calling*.

What does that life look like? Humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love. Relational words.

Why do we need humility? Because proud people have difficulty with unity.

Why do we need gentleness? Because harsh people wound the body of Christ.

What do we need patience for? Because growth takes time.

Why must we bear with one another in love? Because every person is loved by God, and each person is still being transformed by Christ.

Unity does not require us to be perfect people, but it does require us to be people who are learning to walk like Jesus with one another.

We cannot produce this type of life on our own through self-help, AI coaching, or sheer strength and willpower. This is a Spirit of God work.

Paul says this in Galatians:

I say, then, walk by the Spirit and you will certainly not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is against the Spirit, and the Spirit desires what is against the flesh; these are opposed to each other, so that you don't do what you want.

Galatians 5:16-17 (CSB)

God's Spirit empowers our walk, but we still have to take the step. The Spirit produces fruit in us like humility, gentleness, love and patience. But we must respond obediently to His leading by putting one foot in front of the other.

We choose repentance over pride, patience over being irritated, gentleness over harshness, and love over selfishness.

And as the Holy Spirit transforms us as individuals into the likeness of Christ, He also forms a people who can actually live together as one body.

So, unity isn't only about becoming a more authentic and transformed believer. It is about becoming that person in a group of people who are striving to do the same. And in that, we display the reconciling power of the gospel that the world cannot understand.

2. WATCH OVER unity.

(Ephesians 4:3-6. C/R: Romans 14:1-19)

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Unity is something that is created by the Spirit of God. Our responsibility is not to create unity, but instead to keep it.

This makes me think of family. I say this to my oldest sometimes, if he is ever getting down on being in our family... I tell him, *That is a God decision. God decided for me and your mom to be your parents and decided that you would be our son.*

That part is done by God. Our part as parents is doing the work to make sure we are loving, nurturing and instructing our kids. We have a part to play, even if choosing our son was the work that God did.

That word *keep* in this verse means to guard, preserve, or maintain something that has already been given.

We do not manufacture Christian unity. It is something that the Holy Spirit creates and entrusts to the church to protect.

Where does that unity come from?

Paul spent the first three chapters in Ephesians telling us.

In Ephesians 2, people who were dead in sin have been made alive together with Christ. Then Paul says Christ has torn down the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and created one new humanity in himself.

In Ephesians 3, Gentile believers are described as being fellow heirs, fellow members of the same body, and fellow participants in the promise.

Paul never commands the church to become one, but he does command us to live like how Christ has made us.

Then he reminds us of what we have in common.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:4-6 (NIV)

One body. One Spirit. One hope. One Lord. One faith. One baptism. One Father.

Paul is saying, *Look at what you share with other believers!*

The unity of the body of Christ is deeper than personality, preference, background, generation, style, intellect, or economic standing because our unity is rooted in the saving work of God Himself.

But guarding unity does not mean pretending every issue is equally important.

There are truths at the center of the Christian faith. If we deny who God is, who Jesus is, what Jesus accomplished in His death, burial, and resurrection, or the good news of the gospel—that all are invited and that salvation is through Him and Him alone—we are no longer talking about minor differences.

But there are other issues where sincere, Bible-believing Christians disagree with one another.

Paul gives us a picture of this in Romans 14. Paul doesn't say that these issues don't matter. He tells them that their disagreement must not become an excuse to despise or condemn one another.

One person's faith allows them to eat anything, but another, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted them.

Romans 14:2-3 (NIV)

For God has accepted them. So the question becomes, if God has accepted my brother or sister, what right do I have to treat them as if they do not belong?

So, Paul presses in:

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.

Romans 14:19 (NIV)

Let us therefore make every effort to be difficult. Let us make every effort to demand our way. Let us make every effort to have everyone agree with you. No, make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification. This is not only good for me, but it is also good for us, and it is good for the church. It should be the resolution.

That sounds similar to what Paul is saying in Ephesians 4:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit. Pursue what promotes peace. Build one another up.

We need to know the difference between doctrines that define the Christian faith, doctrines that shape what church we belong to, and matters where faithful Christians can disagree while remaining in close fellowship with one another.

Some are essential. Some are important enough that they may affect church membership, and some are matters of conscience, wisdom, or interpretation where Christians should be able to disagree without dividing.

Often, we are tempted to treat all of the categories as the same. Sometimes we hold our opinions with clenched fists and the essentials with open hands, and Paul is calling us to reverse this. Hold most tightly the things that make us one.

And don't let the issues that Scripture gives faithful believers room to disagree about cause what Christ brought together to be torn apart.

The Spirit created this unity. Our role is to watch over it.

Type of Issue	What It Means	Examples
1st Tier — Essential	Different Faith	Trinity • Christ • Gospel • Resurrection • Scripture
2nd Tier — Secondary	Different Church	Baptism • Governance • Spiritual Gifts • Eternal Security
3rd Tier — Tertiary	Different Opinion	Earth's Age • End Times • Worship Preferences

There are issues that we must get right. We call these Essentials. We must believe these things in order to be a disciple of Jesus. These are where we should put most of our thoughts, our most rigid and strong boundary of conviction. We must get these right. If there is something in these beliefs that you miss, you are following a different Jesus than the Bible describes.

This also isn't saying that you must know all of these doctrines perfectly. Remember, the thief on the cross was told by Jesus, *Today, you will be with me in Paradise*. Faith in Jesus Christ alone, and surrender to Him, is what is necessary. But these doctrines help to renew our minds in the way of faith.

Secondary issues are those things that are still important, but it might mean that if you disagree, you might need to look for a different church. They are not the most important, but they sometimes can feel the most important.

These tertiary issues are the ones that you can disagree on and still be in the same church. We call these opinions.

I think it is interesting that I generally get the strongest opinions in the bottom two categories and not the top one.

3. WORK in unity.

(Ephesians 4:7-17. C/R: 1 Corinthians 12:18-22)

Unity does not mean uniformity. Jesus is the source of our gifts, and the Spirit distributes those gifts throughout the body of Christ.

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

Ephesians 4:7 (NIV)

We do not all have the same gift, role, or assignment in the body of Christ.

Just because we have different gifts does not mean that we have different values. Your gift tells you how to serve the body. It does not tell you how much you matter to the body.

Paul makes this clearer in 1 Corinthians.

But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

1 Corinthians 12:18-22 (NIV)

Paul says Christ gave leaders to the church ...

... to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ...

Ephesians 4:12 (NIV)

Paul is outlining the structure of the body of Christ. Leaders equip, saints minister, and the body grows.

The work of ministry is not only a pastoral work. Pastors and teachers are given to the church so that the whole church can be prepared to serve and grow.

My responsibility as a pastor is to lead, teach, model, organize, and create environments where the people of God can use what Christ has given to them for the good of the church.

The goal isn't that a few gifted people do everything. The goal is that every part does its work.

Some gifts are public, and some gifts are behind the scenes. Some teach. Some encourage. Some serve. Some organize. Some sing. Some lead. Some give. Some intercede in prayer. Some show mercy.

But these are equal in value. Having a different function doesn't mean having a lesser place. The body only grows when the different parts are working together in unity.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)

This is the picture of a mature, healthy, growing church. Not everyone doing the same thing, not just a few people doing everything. Every part doing its own work for the good of the whole body.

If you are wondering what God might have given you as a gift, one way to help you discover it is through a spiritual gifts assessment we have for you.

<http://www.brookwoodchurch.org/spiritualgifts>

In 1727, a small Christian community known as the Moravians experienced a powerful season of spiritual renewal in Herrnhut, Germany. Out of that renewal, they committed themselves to continuous prayer.

They divided the responsibility among the community. Different believers took different hours of the day and night so that prayer would continue around the clock. That prayer watch continued in Moravian congregations for roughly a century.

And this little community became one of the remarkable missionary movements of the eighteenth century.

In 1732, they sent their first missionaries to the Caribbean. Over the following decades, hundreds of Moravian missionaries were sent around the world, carrying the gospel into places

across the Caribbean, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Americas. One Moravian source notes that this missionary movement began from a community of only about 300 people.

Think about what made that possible.

No one person prayed twenty-four hours a day. No one person went to every mission field. No one person carried the whole ministry. Each person simply took their part.

Different assignments. Same mission. That is the picture Paul gives us of the church.

Christ does not ask every person to do everything. He gives different gifts, different responsibilities, and different opportunities, and the body grows, as Paul says, *as each part does its work*.

One characteristic that is essential is humility. We cannot properly take our place in the church without humility. When you are working together or in a family, there is one thing that is unavoidable. Conflict. In Matthew 18, Jesus emphasizes the importance of repentance and reconciliation in the family of God. It should be the heart of everyone in God's family to have someone repent of their sins. It should be a value to us to see those who were without hope be received back into relationship with their church family.

In Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a process. One that is long but meant to give every person a chance to be restored in their relationship with God and with their fellow believers in the church. Some misuse this to be combative towards those situations of infighting, but I believe that Jesus was giving a long runway to get back into right relationship. The church should be marked by our ability to work with one another in love and not find ways of cutting off relationships as quickly as possible. Working in this way with our fellow believers is an opportunity to show the world how to handle relational conflict effectively.

We should strive to be that kind of church where we can work together to be unified under the banner of Christ. But it is not an easy work to be this type of church family. It hurts, it takes longer than we think, and it means sharing truth and grace. But the world has no categories for this type of relational restoration.

Are you faithfully doing your part for the benefit of the church?

So, what does a church shaped by the gospel look like?

We **WALK in unity**. We choose humility over pride. Gentleness over harshness. Patience over irritation. Love over selfishness.

We allow the Spirit of God to form the character of Christ in us so that we become the kind of people who can actually live together.

We **WATCH OVER** unity. We remember that we did not create this family. Christ did.

We did not manufacture this unity. The Spirit did.

So, we guard what God has given us. We hold tightly to the truths that make us one, and we refuse to allow lesser disagreements to tear apart what Christ died to bring together.

And we **WORK in** unity. Every person has a part. Every gift matters. Every member contributes.

Different gifts do not mean different values. Your gift tells you how you serve the body; it does not tell you how much you matter to the body.

Paul's picture of a healthy church is not a few gifted people doing everything while everyone else watches. It is a body in which every part is connected to Christ, every part is growing, and every part is doing its work.

So maybe the question for us is not simply, *Do I go to church?*

Maybe the better questions are:

- Am I walking in a way that protects our unity?
- Am I guarding what Christ has brought together?
- Am I faithfully doing the part Christ has given me?

Because when a church walks together, guards its unity, and every part does its work, Paul says something beautiful happens:

The body grows. The body becomes mature. The body builds itself up in love.

And the world gets to see what the reconciling power of Jesus Christ actually looks like.

So, church...

- Walk in unity.
- Watch over unity.
- Work in unity.

And let us become, together, the body Christ has called us to be.

If you were with us a couple of weeks ago, we talked about our ministry plan and that we have a 9.58 million-dollar budget. Now, why do I tell you this on Sunday? Because we have a big belief at Brookwood that it's not our money, it's not even Brookwood's money, it's the kingdom's money. So we'd like to bring that to your attention and just say we believe it's a team effort to vote on it. And so, if you call Brookwood home and approve the 9.58 million Ministry Plan for 2026-2027, would you stand right now as a sign of your approval? And let me say again: thank you for your generosity, but I also invite you to pray that every dollar given would be used to glorify and exalt the name of Jesus.

Now, since I'm up here and we are talking about unity today, I'm going to ask you to do one more thing that might make you uncomfortable. I'm going to ask you to join hands with the person next to you as we close. As Bryan mentioned earlier in the service, if you have questions or if you would like to pray with someone about finding forgiveness and striving for unity or if you'd like healing, we'll have our Advisory Team down front, and we would love to pray for you.

Let's close in prayer.