

**Text: Ephesians 4:1-6**

**Title: “One in Christ”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

It's been an awesome weekend of ministry and witness for our church. Thursday night we had the Call of the Wild men's ministry dinner. We had 450 guys come; 26 who indicated they had prayed to receive Christ. Koinonia Class delivered 70 bookcases they built to 3rd graders at Clarke Elementary to decorate with their family. Each child also received a Bible. This is the 3rd year the Koinonia Class has done this project totaling 215 bookcases and Bibles. This morning at 5:30am we had the worship service at the Will Rogers Exhibit Hall prior to the start of the Cowtown Marathon/Half-Marathon. We had about 300 show up. These events of service involve scores of our members. We really are better together.

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:1. There are six chapters in the book of Ephesians. The first three chapters are doctrinal, showing us the great truths of our faith. The last three chapters are practical, showing how to live out the truths of the Gospel in various relationships. Read Ephesians 4:1-6.

This is the last in this series of messages I've entitled “Holy Habits.” Our mission as a church is to develop passionate followers of Jesus Christ. We understand from the Scripture that passionate followers of Jesus exhibit certain qualities or habits. We identify these in our Blueprint for Spiritual Formation. And the last of the seven states:

## **PASSIONATE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST ARE IN THE HABIT OF BUILDING CHRIST-CENTERED RELATIONSHIPS**

God has so designed the Christian life that it has to be lived out in Christ-centered relationships with other believers. A Christ-centered relationship is a relationship where the energy and dynamic of that relationship is the love of God through Jesus Christ. The love that should pulsate in the fellowship of every local church is the very love of Jesus Christ.

Earlier in Ephesians Paul prayed for them:

**Ephesians 3:17b-18 - I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ**

The full knowledge and experience of the love of Jesus Christ cannot be experienced apart from Christ-centered relationships in the church. How do we grasp this love? We grasp it “together with all the saints.”

Before we became believers we chose our own friends. We had complete freedom in picking and choosing with whom we would become close friends. When we become Christ-followers that all changes. From that point God chooses our friends for us when He places us in a body of believers called the church. When we choose our own friends we typically gravitate toward people who are like us and with whom we get along well. If anything goes wrong, we feel perfectly justified in walking away from the friendship. Nothing lost. But in the community of believers it is different.

But God when places us in the church, the Body of Christ, we do not have the freedom to simply walk away from relationships when something goes wrong. In fact, God places us in those relationships not just for our benefit, but for the benefit of others. And God uses the inevitable trials that come in relationships to strengthen our faith.

Now let's look at our text for today. Let me see if I can help us follow the truth in these verses along these lines:

## 1. WHAT WE ARE TO DO (Ephesians 4:1)

**Ephesians 4:1 - As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.**

Paul is writing from a Roman prison to the church members in the Asian city of Ephesus (modern-day Turkey). But why would he start off by saying "as a prisoner for the Lord"? He's in prison because he was radically obedient to Jesus in preaching the Gospel. And when he starts off reminding them of this he is signaling to them that walking worthy of our calling in Jesus Christ, the calling to glorify God with our lives, is worth whatever we have to suffer to do it.

Now we are never worthy of God's love. We are sinners and deserve His judgment. But in spite of that in His love and grace God called us to Himself ... drew us to Himself ... and changed us forever. So we are not worthy of this calling, but once we come to Him we are to live our lives in a way that reflects His glory.

**ILLUSTRATION** – There's a legendary story about the day that the famous Greek conqueror, Alexander the Great, heard of one of his young soldiers who was being rebellious and disobedient to his superiors. The young man's name also happened to be Alexander. Alexander the Great commanded that the young soldier be brought to his tent. When the soldier arrived Alexander the Great began to question him. Have you been disobedient to your superiors? Yes. Have you been derelict in your duties as a soldier? Yes. Then young man, either change your behavior or change your name. You see, the young soldier's behavior was not worthy of the renowned name Alexander.

So what we are to do is to live a life worthy of the calling we have received in Christ. Next we're told...

## 2. HOW WE ARE TO DO IT (Ephesians 4:2-3)

Now we might be a little surprised that when we're told how we are to live a life worthy of our calling in Christ it is really something very mundane. It doesn't say we are to go to remote part of the world to preach the Gospel (though that may be our assignment). It doesn't say we are we will be thrown in prison, like Paul was (though that may happen for some). No, it's really very basic ... it's all about how we treat other people. It's not just what you *believe* but how you *behave* in your relationships with the people you live with and go to church with.

**Ephesians 4:2 - Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**

Again, the life we are called to in Jesus Christ is a life we live in Christ-centered relationships with others. And how we treat others in the Body of Christ is inextricably connected to our mission. This includes people in the church and people in our families.

## **BE HUMBLE**

Though we have a “high” calling, we are not “high minded.”

Humility flows out of our understanding of the basics of the Gospel we have believed. It is that I am so weak, sinful and flawed that Christ had to die for me in order for me to come to God. Yet at the same time I am so loved by God that Jesus was glad to die for me. Knowing that strips the swagger out of my step and the pride out of my attitude.

QUOTE: “The essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.” Tim Keller

And we are to be “completely” humble ... in all circumstances and in every relationship. All these other qualities flow out of that. For example, humility leads to the next quality.

## **BE GENTLE**

To be gentle is to not be harsh with people. Your particular translation may say “meek.” Meekness is not weakness. In fact, the word was used of a wild stallion that has been so subdued that it is at the complete control of its master.

**ILLUSTRATION** – Years ago we had Golden Retriever named Harley. He was our all-time favorite pet. He was a huge dog ... maybe 100lbs. One thing about him is that he was afraid of storms, and whenever we had a thunderstorm there was no consoling him. When you’ve got a 100lb dog upset in your house, everything is upset. He would try to climb up in the bed with us ... push down a door. But as huge and powerful as he was, Harley was gentle with people and with little kids. And that’s the picture of this word “gentle.” He still had all of his strength, but it was under control.

So humility leads to gentleness, and gentleness leads to next thing ...

## **BE PATIENT**

This word “patient” means to heat up without blowing up. Last week I was helping my mother with her computer, which is a dangerous thing to do. You know she’s in trouble when she has to depend on me to fix her computer problems. I was growing very impatient, and computers have a way of sensing that, don’t they? I told my mom she might want to go in the other room and watch television, or she will see her preacher son throw something.

Now it’s one thing to be impatient with a computer, but what about when people provoke us or irritate us? That’s where patience really shows up. Can we heat up without blowing up?

Now in order for us to do that we'll need to do the next thing...

## **BEARING WITH ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE**

This is relational endurance. We know about physical endurance ... the conditioning it takes to bear up under strain for long periods of time. That's physical endurance. But there's also relational endurance. You see, we all have quirks and weaknesses. And we get on one another's nerves sometimes. But we are to endure these things in one another knowing that God has brought that person into our lives for a reason. And the power for this relational endurance comes from love ... agape love ... unconditional, redemptive love.

**ILLUSTRATION** – One of my favorite authors, Gordon MacDonald, tells in one of his blogs about an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting he attended. A.A. is where people who struggle with addictions gather to support and encourage one another. MacDonald said that he visited the group because he had friends who are recovering alcoholics and he wanted to see for himself what their meetings were like. At this particular meeting a woman in her mid-thirties named Kathy came. Gordon could tell by looking at her face that she at one time was a beautiful young lady, but life had been hard on her. Her face was swollen, her eyes were red, her teeth were rotting and her hair was unwashed.

Kathy admitted to the group: “I've been in five states in the past month. I've slept under bridges on several nights. Been arrested. Raped. Robbed (she was now weeping). I don't know what to do. I don't want to be homeless any more. But (sob) I can't stop drinking (sob). I can't stop (sob).”

Sitting next to Kathy was a rather large woman named Marilyn who had been sober for more than a dozen years. She reached over with both arms toward Kathy and pulled her up close against her chest. Gordon MacDonald said he was close enough to hear Marilyn speak quietly into Kathy's ear, “Honey, you're going to be OK. You're with us now. We can deal with this together. All you have to do is keep coming. Hear me? Keep on coming.” And then Marilyn kissed the top of Kathy's head.

That's what we're talking about here. That's the kind of love that will be shown in the Body of Christ. There's plenty that divides us in terms of our likes and dislikes, but there's one thing we all have in common. We're sinners in need of mercy and grace.

Now back to Ephesians 4, the reason we are to live this way in relationships in the church is because we are moving toward a goal...

**Ephesians 4:3 - Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.**

Unity and community in the church doesn't happen automatically. We have to “make every effort” ... to work hard at it.

**ILLUSTRATION** – I did a funeral recently for a great man in our church. I enjoyed listening to his children talk about how they never saw or heard their mom and dad fight. Does that mean they

didn't have problems and differences? No. They simply knew what to do to keep the issue from hurting their relationship. In his case, he would go outside until things cooled down.

Many people are on a quest for the perfect church. "Perfect" is defined by whether or not that relationship happens to meet their needs. If it doesn't they hop from one church to the next looking for the right atmosphere where people treat them the way they think they should be treated. And the same thing can happen in marriages. There are no perfect churches. If you find one, don't join because it won't be perfect anymore.

So we are to work hard to maintain the "unity of the Spirit." That is the unity that is produced by the Holy Spirit working in us and through us. This won't happen if we are consumed by our sinful, selfish tendencies (what the Bible calls "the flesh"). However when we are under the control of the Holy Spirit here's what it looks like:

**Galatians 5:22-23a - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

So this unity is *produced* by the Spirit, but it is *protected* by us. We can grieve the Holy Spirit and quench the Spirit's activity among us if we behave in any way that isn't consistent with what we see here in v.2.

And all this produces the "bond of peace." Peace is like a mighty cable that keeps us together. It's like glue that binds us together.

So we are told what we are to do (live lives worthy of our calling in Christ) and how we are to do it (protecting the unity of the Spirit by humility, gentleness, patience and forbearance). Next we are told...

### **3. WHY WE ARE TO DO IT (Ephesians 4:4-6)**

Here is the basis for our unity.

**Ephesians 4:4 - There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—**

**Ephesians 4:5 - one Lord, one faith, one baptism;**

**Ephesians 4:6 - one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

So this unity of the Spirit, in one sense, has already been secured. Part of the message of Ephesians is that Christ in His death on the Cross was bringing two very different kinds of people (Jews and Gentiles) into the same spiritual family. It's hard for most of us to comprehend just how different these two groups of people were. Hold your place there and turn back to Ephesians 2:13-16. Read.

So the power of God's love ... the power of the Cross ... is seen in the unity of the church. People from radically different backgrounds are now brought into the same family. The unity that Jesus

Christ purchased and guaranteed with his blood has to be lived out and expressed in the life of the church.

And there is a reason why we are to strive for this kind of unity in the church. It is by our preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace that we demonstrate to a watching world that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism ... one God and Father of all. There are not many ways to get to God ... there is one way through Jesus Christ. There is one Holy Spirit who indwells each of us. We all have a common way of confessing our faith in Christ ... believer's baptism. All of this demonstrates the unity that Jesus prayed for in His great prayer in John 17:

**John 17:23 - I in them and you (Father) in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Every local church advertises Jesus ... either truly or falsely. A church may have a Cross displayed on its steeple, but that's false advertising if inside the church there are not people who are being humble, gentle, patient and bearing with each other's failures so as to protect the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.