

# What Do We Have In Common?

## Ephesians 4:1-6

Turn with me if you would to the book of Ephesians. We are continuing on in our study of the book of Ephesians. I become more and more amazed at the idea that the Christian life style is completely dependent upon the work of God in the believer. We all here can simply call ourselves Christians, but unless God is at work within each and every one of us, there is no proof.

For so long I thought that being a Christian was about what I could do, of what I should do, keeping my nose clean and hoping that eventually God would look down from heaven, occasionally see me and come down and pat me on the back – as if my Christian walk was simply about the external. But I realize that being a Christian is about allowing Jesus Christ, who lives in me, to be alive, walking me through each event life hands me, allowing his Spirit to take every opportunity to mold me and make me into who God created me to be.

We look in the world today and we see so many doing the Christian gymnastics of trying to manipulate God, or trying to catch God's attention, instead of simply allowing Christ, who lives in them, to be alive, abundantly overflowing into every area of our lives. The more I see true authentic Christianity, the more I realize that it has less to do with me and more to do with what God can, and will do in me.

When we last left off we saw that God has a calling for each of us. A calling to live our lives with God's hope and purpose, a calling to bring praise and glory to God, a call to submit to his authority, a call to let him LIVE (I mean really live) within us, and a call to allow God's power to work within us. God has a process to produce in us that which will not pass away but remain with us as we have adapted the character of Christ. It is only then that we can call ourselves Christians, that which Paul said last week in our text, is a name that we have to live up to, a name that we have to have evidence of – to live a life worthy of our calling.

This morning I want to look at the next couple of verses and look at the idea of unity. Read with me this morning our text in **Ephesians 4:1-3**:

*I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness, and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. RSV*

I specifically want to look at the idea of what Paul states “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” **One of the greatest complaints about the church and its ineffectiveness has been this idea of unity.** Some say that if we could simply get together then there would once again be power in the church again. Others say that we are too fragmented, too divided, too broken and that because of it we live in weakness.

In the words of Rodney King “If we could all just get along” and agree with each other then the world would see power in our combined numbers. It is as if we think building a Christian army, great in numbers, as if that is what is going to change the world. But is that what Paul is trying to teach us here? Is he saying that if we could all get on the same page, then the power of our numbers will greatly overthrow any force that would come against us?

If that is how we view unity then, I believe, we have missed it! In an effort to bring unity we have failed to acknowledge and consider the diversity that exists within the church. Instead of allowing people to live out their faith based on the mere leading of the Holy Spirit and the scriptures, we have corralled them like cattle into our own understandings and methods.

We have failed to celebrate the diversity of how God can bring together a church of those who are poor, rich, young, old, conservative, progressive, seeker-sensitive, traditional, contemporary, of every race and color. Therefore, I think we can all agree that unity doesn't mean that we aren't different. Even as we look around the room here we see that we are all different. **Unity doesn't mean conformity.**

There is also within the church the issue of personality – all of us are made to respond or react to life differently because we have different personality traits. God has created us that way so that those of us who want to play all the time can be balanced out, and vice versa, by those who take life seriously. I remember a saying my dad use to use all the time. It went like this:

To dwell above with saints we love, O that will be glory. But to dwell below with saints we know, well, that's a different story.

Even though the body of Christ looks so different and is so diverse, and even though each of us posses a unique personality to ourselves, even in the midst of what we think is our disadvantage, when it comes to the body of Christ there still remains a basic sense of unity.

I remember traveling overseas, visiting churches in different countries, some doing things that I thought was off the wall, the fervency of the Korean church for prayer, the kindness and friendliness of the church in the Philippines, the conservative and yet authentic faith of the Chinese church, each very different in their approach, yet at each place there was a sense of unity. That is the unity that Paul is speaking about here – the unity of the Spirit.

Paul tells us in verse three to “be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” **It is a unity that is produced and created by the Holy Spirit at work in our spirit.** The Holy Spirit has done something for us and in us that unites all believers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the church is not simply a group of people who happen to agree on certain things. It is not a gathering of people who can simply claim power in their numbers. But it is a body of believers who have a living, active Spirit of God, who is

alive and working, drawing men and women unto himself, together sharing the life of God. That is the unity that Paul wants us to focus on.

On one hand we are told that unity is based on imposed direction, when what Paul is telling us is that we are to have the unity of shared life – both are entirely different. We read on in verse 4-6 and we find that Paul is describing the unity of the Spirit – 7 elements that bring us as a believers together. Look at it with me:

*There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

### **Seven Things We Have In Common**

#### **1. One body.**

Notice the Paul doesn't say one organization, or one denomination. When one thinks of a physical body they know that it consists of thousands of cells with one mutually shared life. It is the sharing of life that makes the body different from an organization. It is not based on a corporate structure or some type of flow chart, but based on a living, active, unifying force that comes from God. Therefore, **the unity that we feel as believers in Christ should be based on the underlying fact that the same Jesus that is at work in me is also at work in you.** That leads us to the next unifying trait of the Church.

#### **2. One Spirit.**

It is the Holy Spirit who is the true power of the church. I have come to realize that I am just a pawn in the hands of God. He moves me, puts me in the right place at the right time, orchestrating my life, putting people in my path, so that I can be an instrument through which his power can flow and make changes in the lives of those people. He then continues the process of drawing people unto himself, bringing them to an opportunity to make a decision to believe or not, and then based on that decision, either continues to work and mold their character, or to continue to call out to them for repentance. **The only true power in the church is not in the idea of unity, but in the power of God.**

We kind of looked at this last week when I was sharing with you in regards to helping people. How we can do good deeds to help others but the true help that they need is that which is found in the power of Jesus Christ.

#### **3. One Hope.**

We have been united with one hope – the hope that is ours made available through the work of Jesus Christ. We find it mentioned time and again all through the scriptures. **Colossians 1:27:**

<sup>27</sup> *For God wanted them to know that the riches and glory of Christ are for you Gentiles, too. And this is the secret: Christ lives in you. This gives you assurance (the hope) of sharing his glory.*

Jesus Christ initiated a means by which we are becoming more and more like him. **1 John 3:2** says:

<sup>2</sup> *Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.*

**Our hope is that we will be like Christ.** When we see him, we will see similarities in our character to his character, and we will realize how much he has been able to change us from being a lost and wandering soul to one who has been mentored, becoming like the master.

#### **4. One Lord**

**The term “Lord” here means the “ultimate authority”.** As Paul puts it in **Philippians 2:9-11**:

<sup>9</sup> *Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority and there will be no other. The uniting trait of the church is that Jesus Christ is the one in charge. In **1 Corinthians 12:3** Paul wrote:

<sup>3</sup> *So I want you to know that no one speaking by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus, and no one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit.*

Will you say that with me this morning, “Jesus is Lord.” (X3) That is what pulls us together. **Our acknowledgement of Jesus’ authority will unite us in what we do and what we stand for.** But here again, it is still based on the unity that we have in the Holy Spirit.

#### **5. One Faith**

What Paul is referring to here is not the simple act of believing. Everybody has the ability to believe. Some say that “I can’t believe” but that is not true of course because basically what they are saying is that they don’t want to believe or will not believe. But what **Paul is referring to here is the faith, the body of truth about Jesus Christ.** It is what Jude speaks about in **Jude 1:3**:

<sup>3</sup> *Dear friends, I had been eagerly planning to write to you about the salvation we all share. But now I find that I must write about something else, urging you to defend the faith that God has entrusted once for all time to his holy people.*

There is only one true faith that lead to God and that is through what Jesus Christ has done.

## 6. One Baptism

You look around in the churches in this world and you find varying methods baptism. Some with full immersion only, some with a sprinkling of water, some baptizing babies, other not. How can there be unity in this? Instead of getting hung up in the method we need to focus on what it represents. We read in **1 Corinthians 12:13**:

*But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Or have you forgotten that when we were joined with Christ Jesus in baptism, we joined him in his death? <sup>4</sup> For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives. **Romans 6:3***

What raised Christ from the dead? The Holy Spirit, and therefore **the issue of baptism shows that we have been joined with Christ, now possessing the Holy Spirit who is alive within all of us.**

## 7. One God and Father

The unifying trait of God is that fact that he wants to draw near to us as a father who cares for us, wants to be there for us, to help us – that we would feel his father-heart that Paul mentions in **Romans 8:15**:

<sup>15</sup> *So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. \* Now we call him, "Abba, Father."*

**Even though everything finds its beginning in him, even though everything we see in nature is sustained by his power, even though his ways are far higher than our ways, he is still our father, or parent, who want to take care of us.**

All seven of these things that we have in common – all these things that we have a sense of in our spirit because of the presence of God's Holy Spirit – these are the things that bring a sense of unity to the church. Even though we are different, we think differently, we do things differently, we have diversity in expression of worship and color of skin, we

all find unity in the body of Christ. It is amazing to experience this as we travel from church to church, from city to city, from country to country, there is a sense of unity – camaraderie.

Unity is not something that we can create – we do not create unity within the church by getting together and simply doing combined ministry, we do not create unity within the church by trying to make everyone conform to how we do things, or by helping them see our point of view – but unity is the work of the Holy Spirit who has already been at work in each and everyone of our lives, and there will only be unity when we are willing to celebrate the things we have in common with each other in the Spirit – one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father.

If there is already unity in the Spirit then what am I suppose to do to make sure that we remain considerate of others. Look at Paul’s words in verse 3 “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” Unity is what God does, living in peace is our responsibility. Living in peace means that we remain humble, gentle, be patient, making allowances for each others faults (that which Paul mentions in verse 2)

We are to celebrate and embrace those things that we do have in common (things in the Spirit), yet at the same time maintain peace in those areas in which we butt heads. We are all different! God made us that way. Our role is not to build barriers of conformity but to celebrate the unity of Spirit that expresses itself with great diversity. Let’s Pray!