Ephesians 4:1-6

Christian Unity and the Unity of God

Sermon

We now come to the second part of the book of Ephesians. Ephesians is divided up into two major parts, chapters 1-3 we hear the theology of Paul regarding God's plan. We learned about the plan in 1:10 – God has a plan to unite all things that have become chaotic through the fall, things in heaven and things on earth, in and through Jesus Christ. Now in chapters 4-6 Paul moves from his theological portion to his ethical portion. This is where Paul seeks to exhort the church to live out this plan of God that he described in the opening chapters.

The church is a vehicle through which God's restoration on earth happens as we are the expression of God to the world around us. Paul is now going to shift from his theology on who the church IS to who the church OUGHT TO BECOME

We see this shift in Paul in v.1 –

> **"I therefore, [in light of what I have written to you theologically] a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk [to walk speaks of your lifestyle or ethical living] in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." (Eph. 4:1)**

Paul shared the "calling" of us and individuals and as the church…Here is summary of the calling: God has called us to redemption and salvation from His wrath through faith in the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who is now ruling and reigning as King at the right hand of God with all things under His feet. And God has called us to a body, the church, who is a new humanity – a group of individuals who have been reconciled to God and are now reconciled to one another.

The hostility between us and God is over, and the hostility between Jew and Gentile has been abolished through the blood of Jesus …now Paul wants us to ***"walk worthy of this calling".***

One of the most important things for any corporation is the branding of the corporation. When you think of "McDonalds" you think of fast-food, low quality, tastes good but not good for you. When you think of BMW you think of quality, German engineering. When you think of "Restore Hair" you think of Brian Urlacher on the Billboards. A company spends millions of dollars on branding and advertisements. The average length of a Super Bowl commercial is 30 seconds. Do you know what the average cost is of a Super Bowl commercial – over 8 million dollars. 8 million dollars for the company to get their branding in front of you for 30 seconds so that you will purchase their product. Branding is everything.

Paul is now going to show us how we are to "walk". Any corporation will tell you that one of the worst things you can do is to misrepresent the brand. God is love, therefore Paul will exhort us in the coming chapters to walk in love. God is holy, therefore Paul will exhort the Ephesians to walk in holiness. God is a God of order, therefore in 5:21-6:9 Paul spends time talking about submission and order in marriage, in family, in work relationships. Jesus is the triumphant, victorious King over Satan (1:20-23), therefore in chapter 6 Paul talks about the victory that we are to walk in over the devil (6:10-18). Here in 4:1-16 Paul starts with "unity", because God is ONE (Father, Son, and Spirit).

God is passionate about unity in the church because the church is the representation, the branding if you will, of who God is.

Notice here in v.1 that Paul doesn't say, "walk worthy…***so that you will earn*** your calling". Your calling was given to you as a free gift, and it is secured for you by the blood of Jesus. But you must "walk worthy of it"…you and I must represent our Savior and His mission to the world well.

What do you think of when you see this brand? **US Marine Corps**

I think of a unified strength. I think of commitment. I think of sacrifice. I think of courage and bravery.

Any soldier in any military knows that when they wear their uniform, they represent the country whose uniform they wear….for good or for bad. How are you representing the King of Kings who has enlisted you into His army? The greatest army that the world has ever known is the army of Jesus Christ, the church:

> **No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. (2 Tim. 2:4)**

One of the daily practices that the military uses to promote unity marching. It's a very impressive sight. There is a rhythm, a cadence to it. This happens after hours and hours of practice. Eventually, each soldier is perfectly united in cadence with the soldier next to them.

This morning Paul is going to give us several cadences to promote unity. Next week we'll look at 7 affirmations of God that serve as the basis for Christian unity.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

Paul is urging the Ephesians to practice these daily cadences (or rhythms) as they walk together. Notice that Paul is '***urging them'*** – the word is exhorting. This is what leaders do! They exhort. If you are a leader in any form, you will need to exhort those who are under your leadership and you can't abdicate that responsibility. But Paul is exhorting ***"as a prisoner for the Lord"*** – he is leading by example. Paul has proven himself to be a true soldier for Christ and therefore he has the authority to command the Ephesians to "march!" It's so important that as we lead others, our children, our employees, our wives, our message to them is not, "do as I say, but not as I do." The best leader is the one who proves he is willing to die for those he leads.

Notice first that Paul tells us to **march…*"with all humility and gentleness".*** Not pridefully, not with your chest puffed out, but with an attitude of servitude and meekness towards the one who is marching next to you. The word "gentleness" could really be translated "meekness". This is the opposite of harshness, or sarcasm, or dismissiveness. Meekness and humility are often misunderstood as "weakness" and so the temptation often times is to puff up, be sarcastic when friction occurs, make your point, push your narrative, put yourself first in front of the other. Remember that pride is what caused Satan to fall and pride caused the sin of Adam and Eve. Pride is the root of all sin. Therefore, humility is the highest of virtues. Andrew Murray called humility – "the glory of the creature". What is the highest virtue, the highest glory of God's creatures? Many would say, "strength is our glory", or "beauty is our glory", or "wisdom is our glory". But "humility" is the fitting and best position for God's creatures.

Isn't it exhausting to always have to satisfy and serve this insatiable "self" called YOU? Humility is the pathway to true peace and joy and freedom. To let yourself go and to position yourself low before God and others is freeing and the pathway to true joy and peace. This is not our default. Now there is a false sense of humility, we call it "low self-esteem". If you think about it, low self-esteem is not genuine humility, because the focus is still self, "I'm bad…I stink…I am a loser…" Who is the focus? Me! **Humility is NOT low self-esteem…humility is NO self-esteem**. It's a shift of focus from myself to God and to others. The roots of pride are so deeply embedded in our flesh…we have to fight this daily! Everything in the world is telling you to stay on top, be the boss, get ahead and stay ahead! You're not getting what YOU deserve! Daily we have to put ourselves on the altar to God – "you first God, others first God!". This is a habit, a cadence that I need to develop! Here is an acronym that may help us **J.O.Y – Jesus, Others, and after that YOU.**

The next cadence in the march Paul describes is a **march of "patience".** Patience is a state of remaining under the pressure of a circumstance while you wait for a favorable outcome.

Think of something that makes you impatient….you got it? What is at the root of your impatience? Here is the difficult thing about impatience, it starts with a desire for something

that is often times a good desire. Whatever you are impatient about, there is most likely a good desire at the bottom that you are now handling sinfully**. Here is a simple example: you need to get somewhere on time** – that's a good thing to be punctual. I said I would be there and it dishonors others and makes them feel unimportant when I show up late…so I'm impatient with the traffic because I care deeply about those relationships. But shouldn't we trust that God is able to make those relationships prosper? **What about impatience with your kids** – you've told them over and over again…they just won't listen, and you don't want them to suffer because they won't listen…but don't you think God is able to steer your kids hearts towards the truth? ***If pride is the enemy of humility, doubt is the enemy of patience.*** Almost always, if you dig deep enough, when you're impatient it reveals to you an area of your life that you don't trust God with. Impatience, worry, and anxiety go hand in hand…so the way to fix impatience is to trust that God is in control, He is able to take care of it. That God really will work all things out for good…so why be impatient? Why worry? In Philippians 4:6 Paul tells us:

> **do not be anxious about anything [he could have said, do not be impatient about anything], but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6-7)**

Now the context here is relationships within the church – we are to be patient with one another. It's difficult to be patient with someone you have NO CONTROL OVER…but God is able to work in that person's life. If you believe that, it frees you and it will help you to be patient with that person.

The next cadence is "service" to one another…we are to **march, "*bearing with one another in love".*** The heart posture is humility, gentleness, and patience – then, once the heart posture is right, the hands and feet follow in service towards others. A good soldier looks out for the soldier marching next to them.

In "We Were Soldiers" there is a scene where a young sergeant tells his platoon to take off their boots and he begins to closely inspect their feet that are blistered and cut up from the intense drills they have been doing. Mel Gibson plays the Colonel and watching on he says to his sergeant major standing next to him, "that boy right there is a leader." Bearing with one another gets messy…and sometimes we don't think it's our responsibility…but it is!

When Lorrie and I first got married we made the classic newlywed mistake of being sucked into a timeshare. We soon learned that this "great deal" had a ton of fine print to it and we would actually lose money traveling than save it. ***Here is the reality: God has saved you to be a part of the body of Christ – but there's fine print – you have added a whole lot of family members into your life…it's called the church.*** To say, "well that's their problem" is to not

understand the fine print….no…their problem is YOUR PROBLEM. You might say, "well I don't want to be responsible for others"…You signed up for this! ***Jesus would lovingly say, "if you will have me you will have my body or you will have none of me!***" This is once again (I can't say this enough) why "church at home" is not church and why being regularly in church is essential! You have to be IN the body regularly in order to "bear the burdens of one another in love". Now at first this fine print seems like a heavy burden…to carry others burdens…but it is freeing and life giving to put others first! ***To know that you are marching in step with God's will and to see Him use you as you bless others is the most exhilarating way to live.***

Final cadence… we are to **march…"eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."**

The word for "eager" could be translated "zealous". We are to zealously pursue unity within the body of Christ. ***The Holy Spirit has united us together "in the bond of peace" and we are to seek to "maintain" that unity.*** It's amazing how when you meet someone who is a Christian you are almost immediately bonded and in unity with that person…and you just met! However, as we get to know each other, we start noticing spots on one another, we start realizing that neither of us are perfect. And unfortunately, if you know each other long enough, every close friend will inevitably hurt you. So we have to zealously pursue to maintain unity even in the midst of so many things that could potentially divide us.

Marching drills: ***what are some habits that we ought to practice regularly to maintain a cadence of unity?***

First, Practice the rhythm of confrontation and forgiveness – It is inevitable and unfortunate that we will offend one another at times. It's like getting into a marriage, they don't teach you what to do "if" you have a fight, but "when" you have a fight. The temptation when that happens is to do nothing, say nothing. But what happens then is bitterness creeps in. You start to avoid that person. You begin to think the worst of them. No one likes confrontation. It's awkward and uncomfortable, and it feels like it will only create a bigger problem. However, the Bible tells us that is exactly what we need to do when someone has sinned against us – we need to approach that person and talk about it:

> **If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15)**

Don't talk about it to someone else, and if someone comes to you to talk about another person, tell them to go to the person and not to you – avoid gossip that spreads through the church like a wildfire and creates division. James tells us the tongue has the potential to consume an entire forest. Gossip will cause division – avoid it at all costs. Have the courage to go to the person. Some things you need to let go, but you'll know when God wants you to say

something. When it is hurting inside and you can't let it go…you need to go to that person and say something. Go with a posture of humility, and go with the intention to forgive.

Who are we to not forgive others? The Bible ties our ability to forgive directly to God's forgiveness towards us:

> **For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you (Mt. 6:14)**

Second, Practice the rhythm of service – look for opportunities to wash others feet – if God has pricked your heart this morning that you have been "consumed" with your own problems or burdens. Maybe you can lighten the load of carrying your burdens by starting to carry the burdens of others. When you start to serve, all of the problems you carry will become much lighter. ***Paul said: "bear one anothers burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).*** The church becomes a family when each member bears the burdens of one another.

Finally, practice the rhythm of the gospel – the gospel should be the central cadence of your life. Continually remind yourself of the humility of Christ, who being God from all eternity past, humbled Himself, became a man and bore your sin when He died on the cross – then you will become humble, and you will bear the burdens of others. Remember the pain you caused your Savior…Remember the amazing patience He has shown you…then you will become more patient. Think of the mission of God – His plan to bring unity in the world through His Son Jesus and the church is the vehicle to make that happen!

In closing: We as a church must keep this vision of unity before us. Consistency is key…who can you serve this week? What makes you impatient and what do you need to trust God with to help you? Finally, don't get discouraged…marching takes time and consistency with the goal being a united and beautiful expression of the unity of God.

Pray

Connection Group questions:

1. What is something from Brian's sermon that stuck out to you as vitally important?
2. Read Ephesians 1:10 and Ephesians 4:1-6 – how is God's plan in 1:10 fulfilled through Paul's exhortation in Ephesians 4:1-6?
3. How is the military a good picture of what the church is meant to be?
4. Brian said, "humility is not low self-esteem, rather, humility is NO self-esteem. Do you agree? Why or why not.

5. Read Ephesians 4:3 - What are some ways that we can be “eager” to maintain unity in the church?
6. What are some problems that occur within a church when disunity happens?
7. Read Psalm 133 – what do you notice about unity in this passage?
8. Brian mentioned three “cadences” – which cadence do you need to practice?
    - The cadence of confrontation and forgiveness
    - The cadence of service
    - The cadence of the gospel