

Series B: Proper 13—Walk in Unity

Vicar Raymond Doubrava

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Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in our summer sermon series of meditations on Ephesians we now enter the second half of the epistle. Here the Apostle teaches us that to be saved by grace through faith, redeemed through the blood of Christ poured out on the cross, means that we are now joined together as members of the One Body of Christ. Moreover, Paul turns his focus upon how we, the body of Christ, are to conduct our lives.

He starts with this exhortation: **"I ... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."** (Eph 4:1–3). For it was when we were dead in our sins and had no hope of life in us that God called us. When you could do nothing for your own salvation, God called you. David says in Psalm 51, **"I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."** (Ps 51:5). What David said about himself is true about each one of us as well. We were all conceived in sin, and thus, we were all conceived being destined for death.

And yet, God **"chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace."** (Eph 1:4, 7) Christ shed His blood that we may have the forgiveness of sins, and thus have everlasting life. Because we now have life through Christ Jesus we are now to walk in a manner worthy of that calling, which is to say, that we are now to walk the way that Christ Himself walked. And this is the opposite of how the world walks. First of all, when Christ says, **"Follow me,"** He is commanding that we walk in all humility, the first of the attributes Paul lists. Humility is not merely about being modest. Humility means realizing that each of us places the needs of others above our own desires, that we truly live to serve each other.

We should also walk, writes Paul, **"with gentleness"**. This word for gentleness does not mean that you can handle eggs without breaking them. Instead, it refers to not always seeking to have things your way. Here, too, we follow in the way that Christ Himself walked.

We also walk **"with patience"**. Again, this is antithetical to the world. The world is rushed and has no room for patience. When God speaks of patience, it does not mean merely wanting things done fast; it refers to putting up with evil and holding back your anger – not jumping on someone every time they are wrong. The Lord God showed great patience before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and He especially

showed patience with the Israelites themselves many times throughout their history. Thus, as being part of the body of Christ, we are to have the same patience.

Paul's next description is that we **"bear with one another in love"**. Throughout history, we see that love also is not how man operates with one another, but instead with hate. Yet we know John 3:16; we know that it was in love that God sent His Son to die. Likewise, we walk in the same love.

Finally, he says we are to be **"eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit"**. We, as Christians, should pray for the day when all divisions will cease, when Christ shall come again. And we seek to maintain this unity **"in the bond of peace"**. Peace is the glue that maintains the unity. Therefore, it is not insignificant that it appears so frequently in our liturgy. At the end of the sermon, the preacher invokes the peace of God upon you, and again before and after you receive Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion, and again at the end of the service. This is because peace is something that the world cannot give. Only God can give us peace.

But why should we strive to walk in unity with one another? Paul lists a seven-fold set of 'one' that make up this unity in which we are to walk. The first two go together. **"There is one body and one Spirit."** The one body is the body of Christ, that is, the church, as Paul has talked about previously. The one Spirit is the Holy Spirit who gives that body life. Just as God formed man out of the dust and the breathed into him, so likewise, the body of Christ is made up both body and Spirit.

Third, there is **"one hope"**. Our only hope is in Christ Jesus. Apart from Him, we are dead in our trespasses. But in Him we have hope, for we have a promised inheritance, eternal life in Christ Jesus. This is what we have been called into.

Fourth, there is **"one Lord"**, that is, Christ Jesus. It is not accidental that Christ stands at the center of this list. He is the head of the one body. From Him the Spirit proceeds. He is the one in whom we have the one hope. And, as we will see, the other three also relate back to Him as well.

Fifth, there is **"one faith"**. It is only through faith in the work that Christ has done for us that we have life and salvation. Faith in other gods does nothing for you. The only salvation that exists is in the confession of the Triune God—the Father who has created you, the Son who has redeemed you, the Spirit who has called you, who sanctifies you, and who keeps you in the one true faith. Apart from this one faith, there is only eternal damnation. In this one faith, however, there is life everlasting.

Sixth, there is **"one baptism"**. We were all baptized at various times throughout history, some decades ago, some mere months ago. And yet there is only one baptism. Paul writes to

the Romans, **“Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”** (Ro 6:3). No matter when in history you were baptized, you were baptized into Christ's death. Through the One Lord who gives the one faith, everyone who believes and is baptized is part of the same baptism into Christ's death which defeated sin, death, and Satan once and for all time.

Seventh, there is **“one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”** Here, Paul refers to the first person of the trinity as “Father of all”. God is Father of all for He made all. Yet, only we who make up the one body of our One Lord, given life by the one Spirit, with one hope, one faith, one baptism, acknowledge and call Him the One God and Father of all. It is upon these seven ‘one's that our unity is built. It is because of these that we walk in the way that Paul describes at the beginning of the chapter.

Knowing, then, upon what our unity is based, it is important to look briefly at how this unity is preserved. Paul says, **“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.”** (Eph 4:7). We have unity in Christ, yet we are not the same. Each are given different gifts. They are not lesser or greater than other gifts but varied. Many of these will be talked about in a few weeks as we approach the end of chapter five and the beginning of chapter six.

Paul then continues on, **“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”** (Eph 4:11–13). One of the gifts that God has given throughout time is faithful men to spread His Word so that the unity might be preserved. He gave the apostles and prophets, which encompasses all the Old and New Testaments, to write down His Word so that a firm foundation might be laid, upon which the church would be built.

And he continues to send faithful men to be shepherds and teachers. He sends them to equip the saints. A soldier going out to war wants to go out well equipped, not lacking anything. Likewise, we need to be well equipped for going out to war. Thus, our pastors help equip us. (Paul deals more with

this in chapter 6.) Also, He sends pastors for the work of the ministry, which is the public proclamation of God's Word and the administration of the Sacraments. Finally, He sends them for building up the body of Christ, thus acknowledging that pastors are there to oversee the continuation of the church through the ages. (This is not to say that you, the lay people should not witness and strive to bring people into the church. However, this work is overseen by the pastor.) All this is done with the ultimate purpose that we may die having a mature faith and having the unity that we seek.

And we should strive for maturity in faith. We should not wish to remain children, easily led astray by every false doctrine. We, however, should seek to grow in into Christ who is our head, so that we may function as a proper body of Christ, built up in love. This we do by proclaiming the truth in love. Truth and love are not opposites of one another, but the same exact thing.

What a great text this is, then, for us here at Immanuel, as we as a congregation begin looking for a new pastor. Here, in these sixteen verses, Paul tells us where our unity is rooted as the body of Christ, encourages us to walk in that unity, and shows us how God provides to strengthen that unity. What a vital message for us now, that even as we search for a new pastor, our unity with Christ and with one another is not based in some mortal man, but in our crucified and risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So, as our elders and President Lange this month take charge of the call process on behalf of the congregation, with the support and guidance of the council and Pastor Hoger, keep this text in mind as you look at candidates. Remember that, whomever receives a call from this congregation, God will have placed them here at this time so that they may perform all the duties listed by Paul here in Ephesians 4 and elsewhere throughout scripture. Therefore, keep the congregation, the elders, the council, President Lange, and Pastor Hoger in your prayers in these days and months ahead that we may continue to walk in unity with one another as the body of Christ, Christ Jesus Himself being our head.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.