

United In Belief

Ephesians 4:1-6

January 13, 2025

Last week we kicked off the new year with our theme for 2025. What is it? Unity! How many of you have memorized our theme verse? John 17:23 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. We examined that Scripture last week and recognized that it is part of Jesus' high priestly prayer that He prayed for you and me just before His arrest and crucifixion that next morning. Complete unity is Jesus' heart, will, and desire for His followers. If you missed last week's message go back and listen on YouTube or on our website.

Today, we want to talk a bit more about what complete unity is and what it looks like. Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 4. Pew Bible. There are many ways we can be united and over the next couple weeks we're going to look at some of those. But what we start with today is really the foundation. It is Part A that has to be in place before parts B, C, D or any others can be added to it. If you are able, please stand as we read Eph 4:1-6 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be **completely** humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make **every effort** to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is **one** body and **one** Spirit— just as you were called to **one** hope when you were called— 5 **one** Lord, **one** faith, **one** baptism; 6 **one** God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul is addressing the church in Ephesus and he encourages them, and us, to live like Jesus. Since we have been called by the King of the Universe into **His** Kingdom and since our calling was purchased with Jesus' blood, we ought to live lives worthy of that calling. That reflect that calling. Our callings to be pastors, teachers, musician or anything else are all secondary to our calling to be obedient and faithful. To honor God in the way we conduct ourselves each and every day.

And then Paul gives us some specifics. Be completely humble. Say humble. We've spoken about humility before but basically it's not thinking of yourself as less important than someone else, it's not thinking of yourself at all. It is living into the reality that life is not about is. That no matter what gifts God has given you, what He has enabled you to achieve, all of these are gracious gifts from Him and not due to our own intelligence or effort. How many powerful Christian lives have been ruined by pride which is the opposite of complete unity.

He also calls us to be completely gentle. Say gentle. We ought to handle each other with gentleness rather than harshness. Rather than I'll do what I like and you deal with it. It doesn't mean treating everyone with kid gloves fearing their anger or wrath,

but it does mean treating them with honor and respect. Some Christians live like bulls in china closets riding roughshod over others. Either out of ignorance, not knowing any better, or out of apathy. You'll just have to adjust. That is **not** how Jesus lived and that is not a life worthy of our calling and it does not lead to unity. Be completely gentle.

Then Paul admonishes us to be patient. Say patient. What a godly quality. God Himself is very patient not wanting anyone to perish. He's patient with those who are saved or we would have been destroyed long ago. We can see Jesus' patience throughout His ministry. He should have smacked Peter up side the head. And the others. He should have put doubting Thomas in his place. But in patience, he bore with them, and us, in love. Which is what Paul tells us to do next.

Say bear with. Not with a bear---that's how many who live with us see us. They have to live with a bear. No. We are to bear with others. That means to make allowances for their shortcomings, for those things they do that really get on our nerves. We all have strengths and we all have weaknesses. Just as we want others to bear with our weaknesses, we also need to bear with theirs. That doesn't give us excuse to be sloppy or lazy or haphazard. Other Scriptures speak to that. But even when we try very hard, we all fall short so we must bear with each other in love. Say in love.

That is the key. Not out of duty. Not out of obligation. But out of genuine love for each other. We'll say more about that another Sunday, but in general, love ought to unite us in the body of Christ. Paul then tells us to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Say every effort. That doesn't mean, "I'm going to try once and if they buck me, I'm done." No. Every effort. Like hunters who make every effort to find a big buck or businessmen any buck. Like homemakers who make every effort to keep a clean house, in spite of us who mess it up. Like athletes who make every effort to win the games in spite of bad refs, poor coaches, or less talented teammates. Make every effort. How many relationships would be saved, repaired if we were completely humble and gentle, patient and bore with one another in love?

Which brings us today to the heart of message. Say belief. Unity begins in Christ as we spoke about last week, but that belief in Christ must be based on a common understanding of who Jesus is and what He wants us to do. There's all kinds of ideas out there today about who Jesus was and is, what He said and didn't say, and what His will is and is not. There are preachers and even denominations who preach and believe things about Jesus totally opposite to what He taught and did. Paul even warned the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:4) about those who preached a Jesus other than the Jesus he preached, and who promoted a false gospel. This is nothing new. So how do we know what to believe? Say Bible.

In order to maintain the unity that Jesus prayed for, we need to be united in our beliefs which means we must have a common foundation for those beliefs. I'm so

thankful for the Covenant Brethren of Church Statement of Faith for it clearly and concisely outlines what we believe regarding most aspects of the faith. What do we believe about God the Father, the Holy Spirit, the Son. What do we believe about marriage and sexuality and the sanctity of all human life. What do we believe about how we are to treat each other? One page, front and back, with many footnotes identifying where in the Bible each of those beliefs comes from, most with multiple references.

The Bible is our common foundation for belief. It marks the outlines of what we consider to be God's will and what isn't, what is sin and what isn't. And as such, it provides boundaries within which we may still disagree about minor points or exercise our faith with various differences, but the basics, the fundamentals are clearly spelled out. As such we don't have to argue all the time about issues the Bible has already settled. We don't have to look at each other with suspicion and mistrust because we don't know where others stand. We stand together on these issues and it is incredibly freeing and unifying to live into that.

There was a time not very long ago when most all Christians would agree with every point of the Statement of Faith. That day is no more. We have people claiming to be Christians who don't even believe Jesus is God. Some who don't believe the resurrection. Some who don't believe God created the heavens and the earth. And so on. It makes it very hard to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace when you're constantly arguing over fundamental beliefs. We may still disagree about what color the drapes should be but for crying out loud, we have to agree what house to live in. In fact, the only Biblical reason to leave a church is when that church fails to adhere to Biblical teachings and beliefs or fails to practice them which we'll talk more about later. Not the color of the carpet or the type of music or the height of the preacher. Are the music and the preacher Biblical? Are the people repentant of sin and striving toward holiness? Is the church seeking to teach and obey the Bible and follow Jesus the best they can? Joke about the church I used to Go to. Only if it failed to believe and teach truth.

In the same prayer we looked at a portion of last week, Jesus' high priestly prayer, He prays that the Father would sanctify us, that is make us holy, make us like Himself. And He even included the strategy for that. In John 17:17, He says, "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." God's Word. God's Word is our standard for what we are to believe and what we are to do. If you don't believe God's Word or accept it as the guide for your life, that's your decision, but in this congregation and thankfully in this denomination, that is our standard. God's Word tells us the truth about Jesus Christ. It tells us the truth about what He taught and did. It tells us the truth about Who He is and what He came to do.

God's Word also tells us the truth about how we be saved. There are so-called Christian pastors out there today who say you can work your way to heaven. Some are

saying the atonement, the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross, the pouring out of His blood to forgive our sins, is **not** the only way to be saved. But we firmly and finally say no to such teachings. Why? Because the Bible clearly says no to them. Do you see how important it is to be united in belief? Lots of people claim to be united in Christ but are not united in their beliefs about Him. I remember what it was like to sit in Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren arguing about what the Bible has already settled. Discussing with other pastors in Standing Committee what the clear Word of God says. I'm not talking about minor points, I'm talking about major doctrinal theological truths settled in the Scripture. And so truth must never be sacrificed on the altar of unity. Jesus prayed for our sanctification by the truth that night before He prayed for our unity. You eventually end up with the lowest common denominator of belief.

Which is why it's important for us to know what we believe. We can't be united in belief unless we know what those beliefs are. Yes, we need to read and study our Statement of Faith. We've included it as an insert in your bulletin today. Read over it point by point. I know you have and I know that some of you went through the Sunday School Class in which we examined it over the course of several months. Much of it was review and that's OK. Coaches rarely introduce new plays at practice. They keep going over the basics of throwing and catching, blocking and tackling because that's where games are won or lost.

One of the speakers we had a few years back, Brett Kunkle recently sent out a quiz he gives students at the beginning of his training. These are believers. (1) Write your definition of the Trinity. And (2) what biblical passages would you cite to support the doctrine of the Trinity? (3) From memory, what biblical passages support the Christian view of salvation and what's required? And a little later, In a couple of sentences, explain the gospel. We can only be united in our beliefs if we know **WHAT** we believe.

In our Scripture today, notice what Paul says in verse 5. There is one body and one Lord. Say One Lord. We have one Lord. You don't worship the sun and I worship the moon. No. One Lord Jesus Christ. One faith. Say one faith. That means one set of common beliefs. Some denominations use the Apostles Creed to state their one faith. I preached through that a few years back because like our Statement of Faith, it declares unapologetically where we stand on theological issues. Who is God, who is Jesus, what is the Church, what happens when we die? How are we saved? Who is our enemy? Etc. One Lord and one faith.

And, Paul says, we have one baptism. Say Baptism. There may be many different ways to baptize: forward, backward, pouring, etc but the bottom line is that baptism in water is an identification with the one Body of Christ. 1 Cor 12:13 tells us, "... we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body." It is an outward demonstration of inward decision. It is a declaration that the blood of Jesus washes us whiter than the snow

that fell this week. We'll say a bit more about the mode of baptism another Sunday, but most Christians believe that we have one baptism into Jesus Christ.

And one God and Father of us all who is over all and through all and in all. Say one God. Once again, it's easy to say one God but which God? The Muslims believe in one god also. In fact, in a repudiation of the Holy Trinity, they say we believe in three gods. So we must be prepared to respond to those who say all roads lead to heaven as long as we believe in god. How do we know what to say in response? The Bible. We must study the Bible to know what it says about God and how the Father of Jesus Christ is very different than the Allah of Islam. The god of Islam demands that you convert your neighbor or kill him. The god of Islam is not a god of love and you cannot ever have a relationship with him. The god of Islam is very different than the God of Christianity. We don't have to know everything about Islam's god or the many millions of gods in Hinduism or the other world religions. I can't keep all that straight. Thankfully, we don't have to. We just need to know what we believe. So we know when we see or hear something other than that. Before they came up with those special markers, they used to train bank tellers to identify counterfeits. Not by knowing what all the fake ones looked like, but by knowing what the real ones looked like so well that they could easily spot a fake.

Which is why it's important for us to do a couple things to know what the real faith looks like. 1. Read the Bible. If you're not reading the Bible every day, please start today. There is no way you can know what you believe or be united with the rest of the church in belief if you don't know what the Bible says. There are a number of Bible reading plans, the most important thing is to read it! But, you say, I can't understand it. Praise God there are many study aides but most importantly, ask the Holy Spirit to make it clear. In my reading this week, I came across a wonderful prayer we all should pray every time we sit down to read the Bible. Ps 119:18 "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."

Another great way to understand it is to participate in a small group of some type. A Sunday School class, a Bible Study, a home group, all the above. Discuss it around your dinner table with your family. Incredible and even miraculous things happen when we come together around God's Word. Attending the various speakers we have, apologetics, creation, revival, etc. There is no way we can ever be united in our beliefs if we don't know what we believe.

Now before we finish today, I want us to look back at Ephesians 4, but jump down to verse 13 where we see Paul's goal, which is Christ's desire that "we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." We are to be mature which means we have to grow in our faith. And as we grow, we will reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. That is Christ's desire. I pray that it is ours as well and

that we will continue to grow in our unity of belief that we might answer Jesus' prayer for the complete unity of His Church.