

Keeping the Unity of the Spirit

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:1-3
Preached on: Sunday, March 13, 2022

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Let's turn now to the word of God and we'll read this evening a portion of Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4. I'm going to read the first 16 verses.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. 7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The text from the word of God that we consider this evening is the first three verses.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness,

with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, now is a time of great division, schism, unrest, disagreement, trouble, that is occurring not simply in our churches but the churches the world over, and also in the world, and in our homes, and in our marriages, and in our families, and there is a reason for that: sin, the devil. Underlying this text is the reality that it is the Spirit who unites and it is the devil who divides. Now don't misunderstand, it is not the truth of the text that every kind of unity is of the Spirit, nor is it true that every kind of division is of the devil. Don't misunderstand. But neither because of that should we underestimate or minimize the great great importance of unity, unity not only in our families and marriages, in our own life and in the church, but especially the church, your own particular church.

The unity of the church is one of the most precious truths and I daresay perhaps the most precious truth about the church. That should be evident from just a couple of considerations. 1. What you and I just confessed not so long ago in the Apostolic Creed, the fundamental thing that we confessed about the church is that there's one church, "I confess a church." Now that church is holy and catholic, to be sure, but the fundamental characteristic of the church is that it's one, and that this is the fundamental characteristic of the church is brought out even in the passage when we read where the apostle is talking about unity and stresses that word "one, one faith, one Lord, one baptism." There's a reason for that and that is because unity is necessary for blessing, it is necessary to live.

Try to enjoy blessedness and life and joy in the midst of war. It can't be done. It's difficult. Peace and unity are required for growth. More on that in just a bit. The importance of unity is related to God himself. If you ask yourself what is the most fundamental characteristic of God, what is it? You would probably with me cite all kinds of virtues: God is righteous, God is gracious, God is love, God is this, God is that. But you would miss the mark. The fundamental confession of God is that he is Triune, that is, he is one. Not simply numerically one so that he's one God over against all other gods, he's the only one God, but the fundamental confession about God is that he's three who is one. That, you see, is fundamentally different, and that leads us to the point of this entire book. I'm preaching through this book right now, I didn't pick this to preach to you because of any particular reason other than this is where I am right now in the book, and you don't have the benefit of the previous sermons so let me set it up for you. The main theme of the book is the blessedness of the church but the blessedness of the church is its unity. If you go back to chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, the apostle talks about the great mystery, the mystery of all mysteries, and that mystery really is God himself, it's the mystery that God is three in one. He's a unity and God decided to reveal that great mystery to us and to reveal it in a very very wonderful way which is by bringing us into that unity, and that is the truth that the apostles sets forth in the previous three chapters, that's the doctrinal section. There he sets forth God's great desire and will in eternity to choose us to be members of Christ, and being made members of Christ we are one with him but because we are one with him, all who are members of Christ are also one with

another and therefore also one in God. That's the great doctrinal truth of the book of Ephesians.

So it should not surprise us, then, when it comes to the doctrinal or the practical section which chapter 4 begins; the next three chapters now will be the implication of that. The apostle says and begins with, "Now this is your calling and it's to keep that unity, to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And in so doing, the apostle also is going to set forth, really, how different that unity is from all other kinds of unity, shows what true unity is versus false unity. So consider with me this evening this word of God under that theme, "Keeping the Unity of the Spirit." Keeping the unity of the Spirit. We notice in the first place the exhortation or the calling, we'll call it calling because that's the word the apostle uses, your calling. Secondly, the manner, how this is done. And finally, the importance.

I'm going to violate a rule of making sermons and preaching sermons a bit because my third point is the importance but I'm going to talk somewhat about the importance right now because it's virtually impossible not to. The apostle here gives a calling, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation," that word vocation is the word calling, it comes from the word for call, "wherewith ye are called," the same word is used twice, the Holy Spirit thereby bringing our attention to this calling and emphasizing it, bringing to our attention that this calling is important. Now I already established for you somewhat the importance of this, it has to do with the unity itself. If the unity of the church is one of its most fundamental characteristics and that unity of the church as one of its fundamental characteristics flows from the unity of God himself as a Triune being, it should not surprise us, then, that this is where the apostle begins.

Now I think you all know somewhat what's found in the book of Ephesians. I think you know that the apostle has much to say to the people of God. He comes to them and he talks to them as individuals, talks to them as a church. He has a word to them, an exhortation to them, a calling that he gives to the church as fathers and mothers and children, husbands, "Husbands, love your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands." He has all kinds of things to say. This is where he begins thus indicating its importance and that all the other things he has to say center around this one great exhortation.

Now that ought to strike us that's important. The text begins with the word "therefore." I think you are aware that every single epistle written by the Apostle Paul is divided into two parts, the first part where he teaches the truth about God, the truth of the gospel, then generally about the halfway point in the book he uses the word "therefore" and he teaches the practical implication of those truths, in other words, the exhortations flow out of the doctrine which is all by itself instructive but we don't have time to get into that this evening other than to take note that there's no such thing simply as doctrine in scripture. Doctrine comes with practice and practice always follows doctrine. Practice without doctrine is worthless practice and doctrine without practice is worthless doctrine. So he always has that.

Now about that, what's especially striking is if you read the first three chapters of Ephesians you're going to discover that it's amazing doctrine. He just piles doctrine upon doctrine and there is some of the most wonderful truths in all of scripture about God, about grace, about his salvation, about his electing love, if perhaps some of the most quoted portions in scripture found in our creeds other than perhaps the book of Romans. And what's striking about that is when the apostle now comes and says, "Now this is your calling," he is basically saying right here in this passage, "This now is your one calling. Regardless of what I have to say, regardless of what's going to follow here, if you don't understand that this is your one basic calling, you will fail in all the other things and all the other things are derived from and they find their power in this one great calling." In other words, the instruction that he has for husbands and wives and parents and children and for members of the church all have to do with actually maintaining the unity of the church. The apostle therefore isn't addressing, say, marital issues and giving instruction on marriage apart from this. That's evident when he gets to the section on marriage, he talks about the great mystery of Christ in the church. Notice that word "mystery," that mystery is the great unity of the church. In other words, one should never even look at his own marriage as an entity in itself but always look at it in connection with the church. It has to do with keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now I emphasize that because that is minimized and ignored often in the church and the result is often that the unity of the Spirit is actually broken and division results in that. It is not unusual for people to divide, to split, to create schism, to promote sex and mutiny in church or state on the basis of doctrine. Now that may be necessary. I'm not saying it isn't necessary but there's a reason why the apostle later on talks about people being blown about by winds of doctrine, and there he points out that if people are blown about by winds of doctrine and the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is not maintained, the result is the church can't grow up, it can't mature just like a little child cannot mature rightly in a home filled with division. Any parent with a half a brain in their head who is inclined to go at war with their spouse ought to recognize the destruction that that causes in the children, and that doesn't just destroy children but it destroys the church, it goes at the church.

So the apostle does something surprising. He says, "Now look at all the truth. It's truth we're fighting for, defending. I'm not saying to you now that in the interest of unity and the spirit of love and fellowship we depart from or we tolerate false doctrine with regard to election and God's love and the redemption of Christ, all these beautiful truths." He's not coming now with an entirely new truth and saying, "Now what I have to say about keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace goes against all those other truths." No, that would be a mistake. There's one truth even as there's one Lord, one faith, one baptism. But also now don't imagine that your very first calling, the vocation wherewith you are called, your calling of callings is anything other than keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. In other words, it must live in the soul of every single member of the church, this is what we must do, this is our one great calling. If it's true that God has, as we read in the previous verses, chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, and I could go on and on and on with the wonderful truths he sets forth, response to that is now keep the unity, and

the idea is if you don't you will lose those truths, the church can't be the one great church God wants it to be, that's the idea.

Now a couple of other things that I want to simply point out before we get into the calling itself is that this is a calling that basically comes to the church itself. It does, indeed, come to us as individuals but the apostle here is addressing the church, and he is addressing the church both as an organism and an institution. You know as well as I do that there's a distinction to be made with regard to the church. There is the church as an organism. We often refer to the church as an organism when we refer to the church as the body of the elect, invisible, truly known only to God. It doesn't have anything to do really with any institution. It has to do with those who are joined to Jesus Christ in faith and in love. That's the church and it's an organism, it lives, it grows, he has just explained that in the previous chapters too. It's a building fitly framed that grows up. It's a body that grows. It's like a child that grows. But he's also talking to the church as an institution. You see, you cannot have the church as an organism without the church as an institution. The church as an organism is invisible, can't see it, and because we live in a visible physical creation, the church must take physical expression and we call that the institution, the institution is the church as it's organized under elders into a single body like Grace Protestant Reformed Church.

So the idea is that this calling comes to the church and it's my opinion that this is coming to the church as an organism and as an institution, and especially as an institution, and my ground for saying so is that he's speaking to an actual instituted church here, he's talking to an actual living institution called the church at Ephesus. And he's saying, "Now you," the church at Ephesus, and by implication every other institution of the church, "carry out this calling." This is, itself, a good reminder about keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace because there's many who divide the church based on that distinction. It is not at all unusual for someone to minimize the church as an institution. They say to themselves, "Well, you know, the church is the body of the elect. That's really the church, the elect people of God, and I'm a member, I'm an elect child of God, I'm joined to Christ and therefore I really don't need the institution. I have a problem with the institution. I see issues in the institution. I see sins. I see decisions that I disagree with and therefore I'm going to go off. I'm going to split from the institution." And oftentimes people don't even bother to join another institution or care about joining another institution because to them the church is the organism. You can't keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace with that attitude.

Then there's others who strictly identify the church with the institution, everything comes down to the institution, it's all about the institution. You may think here Roman Catholic Church. They believe there's only one institution that is the one church. That's their view, there is no salvation outside of that institution. So keep that in mind too. There are those who make gods out of the institution, "The Protestant Reformed churches are the true church," and though they may not say it out loud, say it to themselves, "and the only true church." That will create division in schism too. It does. Once that idea creeps in, then one can also make a new institution and call that the true church and no others, but that's a Catholic notion and it doesn't lead to unity, it leads to division.

Now the calling itself. The calling is to keep that unity. That is important because it's right here that the church also engages in false unity and promotes false unity. We should recognize that there is a great threat to the unity that is spoken of here in the text. One of those great threats is the world itself. Don't forget that one of the great themes of scripture even as it's laid out here in Ephesians, is the great mystery of God to unify the human race unto himself. That's exactly what the apostle says in chapter 1, verse 9 and 10, "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself," which is, what? To save some people? To bring us to heaven? He's talking about election here. No, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." That's even broader than human beings. God's great plan, God's great purpose even in his election of us is to gather all things together in Christ, and part of that gathering is the church.

Now the devil hates that notion. The devil despises God and his union, and he despises this great revelation of God's plan and so he seeks to thwart it, and he seeks to thwart it by creating false unity. That's why the world will end the way it does, with an antichrist, the devil's own christ who will unite mankind. He's busy working at it now, uniting the nations. He has a problem and that is the nations he seeks to unite are sinners with their own ambitions. They're proud, they're lifted up. Try to unite that rabble together. But he will succeed for a time but it's not real unity, it's not true unity and Christ is going to come and destroy it, show it, split it all up. In fact, it will already be split by the time he comes. The very kingdom of the antichrist will be at war.

But it goes on in the church too. It often happens in the church where there's ecumenical movements, people, institutions that gather together and say, "Let's be one," and they will invariably always point to this text. It is the favorite text of all of modern ecumenical movements that have been around, but it too is false unity as we will show. It looks good on paper, it seems to be right, but it's wrong because it's not based on one faith or one baptism or even one lord. It may start that way, "We're going to gather together as churches who confess the Lord as he's found in, say, the Reformed creeds," but over time it always degenerates until any kind of lord is accepted, any kind of confession, not even Christian ones.

Now what that indicates is why the command is what it is, it's to keep the unity. Notice in the first place that's not "make unity." He does not come to the church and say, "Make unity. Make yourselves one." And there's an important reason for that, because you and I can't do that. This is God's work. This is God's great mystery. This is God's great plan. It is God who unites an individual and who unites a church whether as organism or institution to Jesus Christ and unites the members together. You can't create that, only God can create that. The church, don't forget, is his church, not your church. It is the body of Christ, not your body. So the calling is not "make unity" but "keep it."

Now notice also he doesn't say manifest it. He could have said manifest the unity because that's a calling too. We do manifest the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We're

doing it right now when we gather together, when we have Communion, when we worship. Pretty much the same way there's a manifestation of unity. When churches join together in a federation, they are manifesting their unity. They are saying, "We individual congregations which stand along on our own, which are autonomous, so autonomous that we can come or go, we answer only to Jesus Christ, nevertheless we'll federate, we will join together," that's what the word means to manifest our common confession, our common goals, our common desires, and to assist ourselves in work that otherwise we could not do as an individual congregation, say, missions. And even in judgment, the great benefit of a federation also is that it doesn't leave judgment to a simple individual congregation but there's a multitude of counselors that come together to decide a matter. But that's not the calling either. The calling is to keep it. Keep it.

Now that word should not be unfamiliar to you, that's the word that God gave to Adam. The one great calling of Adam was, "Keep the garden." You remember that, right? "Adam, you have one job to do, keep the garden." And that calling implied danger. That word already from God indicated that the devil had fallen and he was a great threat and one day he would appear in the garden so, "Adam, keep the garden." And that's the idea here. The idea is that there is lots of threats to the unity of the church. God creates it, God makes it, but make no mistake, exactly because God forms and God makes the unity and it's so important to God, there are threats and dangers, false unity and everything else under the sun, therefore keep it. But you have to understand another reason why that is the calling, to keep it, not only because there's threats out there, threats in other churches and threats out in the world, the threat of the devil himself working in the nations to unify not on the basis of the word of God, not unify spiritually but unify over earthly and physical things. Don't forget every great world power has united on those bases, unified over a desire for money, over good living, over political ideals, but that's not rote threat that's really on the face of this, the real threat to the unity of the church is found right in your own heart and in your own soul. It's found right within the church itself. You see, the church that God unifies is a church right now of sinners and sinners, you have to understand, are proud, every one. The people God unites unto himself and in a church are narcissists, are people that think only of themselves, that aren't interested in being unified really with anyone. Simply look at marriages, why in the world would a husband and wife fight? Why? What's the explanation for that? And as soon as you ask the couple the question, what do you get? They both point their fingers at each other. His fault. Her fault. No, no, the problem is sinners, sinners who are proud, and pride destroys unity, sin destroys unity.

And that's our default position. Understand that. You all think that we're joined here in a church and we all gather together and that we naturally do this. No. This is against your nature and if you don't understand that pretty soon you won't be keeping the unity, you will be dividing, then pretty soon the church is for you a place to work your division. Why is that? Because we don't like unity either. Don't forget in our flesh lives the devil's spirit and that's a spirit of individualism and individuals only want this kind of unity where you all listen to me, where either you are all under me so I am king, or you all need to be just like me. You need to act like me, think like me, make decisions like me. You see, that's our kind of unity but that's not true unity. True unity is to take diverse, diverse

things even that you think can't be joined together and join them together so that they're one. That's the great mystery of marriage.

You see, unity is an amazing miracle. It is not something that man can bring and do. He thinks he can but he can't. Why? Because of what unity is. You see, if I take a block of wood and I hold it up and I say, "Look, that's one," you're going to say, "Well, of course it is. It's a block of wood. What's the great miracle in that? What's the great miracle in that?" Now there is more to it, if you look close you're going to find out all kinds of individual things that are made together into one block of wood, but therein lies the issue. You see, the more diverse the things are that are brought together, the more wonderful the thing is.

Now look at the church. The great mystery, the great mystery is that God takes something that's even more diverse than husband and wife, by the way, that ought to teach you what the wonder of the church is. So think about it. We've got a husband and wife, now they're not that diverse from many points of view, two human beings, two human beings that really need each other, male and female. You would say to yourself, "Why, unity there is quite natural. I mean, look, a man and a woman. Why, if they get married they're naturally going to be one." And we find out that's not the case at all. In fact, you know, sometimes you scratch your head and you look at a marriage, you look at what's going on and you scratch your head and you say, "Why in the world do they hate each other? What a wonderful woman this is and what a wonderful man that is. Look, why are you fighting?" But there they go. Why? Because union is God's creation and all it takes is a little difference, just little differences, it doesn't take much. It's like sand in the shoe, it gets at you after a while and pretty soon they're at it.

So now look at what God does in the church. Now even when you look here, we see people all pretty much similar in race, color, background, language, perhaps economic background and other such things, and we think, "Wow, we've got unity." No, even that is easy to get broken up and divided asunder so that the rich despise the poor and the poor despise the rich, the smart despise those who are more ignorant, and the ignorant the smart. It's unbelievable. Now expand the scope across the globe and God is going to unite white and black, rich and poor, male and female, and do that with a number of people that you cannot count and he's going to make them one, and in a oneness and a unity that is tighter than the block of wood. And God wants that unity kept, kept exactly because the great barrier to unity is that we don't like differences, we don't tolerate differences, we don't tolerate people who don't think like we think or act like we act, that don't make decisions the way we'd make decisions. Now do you understand why this is the one great calling of the church?

Before I move on to the manner, one more thing on the importance, and that is without it you don't have a church. If we could talk as a fool, if God was not one, in other words, if you had three persons that were not one, you would not have God. You wouldn't. Similarly without unity you don't have a church.

Now the manner. This is even more important. The manner is given basically in the second verse. The main calling is to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That's the great calling, but before he gets to that he fills in how it's to be done, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Now that also has to shock you and the shock of it indicates exactly why the calling is what it is, keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. To put it in other words, the Holy Spirit says, "keep the unity of the Spirit and this is how you do it, you do it with lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another."

Now that's not what comes to my mind. What comes to my mind is keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by warfare, pulling out your sword, beating your shield, exerting your authority, pounding the pulpit, yelling, exercising a little ecclesiastical muscle. Isn't that how we keep unity, right? Husbands, isn't that how you try to keep peace in your home, right? "I'm going to exercise my authority as the head of the home so I'm going to get my wife in line too," right? Or perhaps even we're the wife and we say, "Well, here's how I'm going to keep the unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace, I'm going to fight for my rights," or perhaps even worse, we look at these things and we say, "Well, I'm going to be lowly and meek," but that's really not going to work for we adopt those virtues but they're really not lowly and meek, what we do is we shut our mouth, inwardly we say about our husband, "What a bad guy. God ought to hate him."

Now that's not it. Now don't mistake, the apostle isn't saying here that keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace doesn't involve fighting. Just turn a few chapters and, in fact, he's going to close the book with these words, "So put on your armor, people. Grab the sword, the sword of the Lord, and the shield, put your helmet on and get ready for battle." Don't misunderstand him, but you have to understand that even when battle is conducted, it has to be conducted with lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. I can prove that to you. Meekness. When it comes to meekness, the apostle says that we must have meekness in Galatians 6, the sister book to Ephesians. It says there you have to have meekness in dealing with the sinner, chapter 6, verse 1. In 2 Timothy 2:25 he says the servant of the Lord must be meek in order to deal with those who oppose them that he might win them and gain them. You see, one of our problems is we look at these virtues and we say, "Well, how do you keep unity with that?"

Or we might look at those virtues and say, "Why those?" Well, there's a reason why. First, let's back up. Let's look at the calling. We are endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and the idea is that those virtues most harmonize with the way that unity is manifested in the church, how unity comes about. So what is the unity of the church? What is the bond? What is it that unites? Now I suppose you could say faith, faith is what unites us to the Spirit or to Christ. That's true, we call that a bond, but the apostle has his mind on another bond which is the essential bond that unites the persons in the Trinity and a bond that unites a believing husband and wife, and that bond is the bond of love.

The idea is what he says in love, well, I have to show that too. If you look at verse 2, he says forbearing one another in love. It happens a couple of times in this book where he says to do something in love and it's very well possible and more than likely that the "in love" actually goes with the next phrase. You see, in Greek there's no commas, there's no punctuation so translators and readers of it have to figure out where phrases go and the King James interprets it this way, that we're to forbear one another in love. That's certainly true but read it this way once, in love endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and that makes sense because the bond is love and the result of the bond of love is always peace. In other words, those things have to do with how the unity is made. How does God unite us together to Christ and to himself and to one another? And the answer is love. If you don't love one another, you are not united to one another. It's not just simply that you won't be, you can't be. It's the underpinnings and the result is peace, so that's why he calls it what he does, in love endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit and the unity of the Spirit is the bond of love, and the result of love is peace, so he calls it the bond of peace. That's what it means.

Now so what? We have to go a little deeper. Why is it called the unity of the Spirit? Why not unity of the church, that's what he's talking about? Why not endeavor to keep the unity of the church? And the answer is because the unity is actually the Spirit. The love is the Spirit, it's the Spirit of love. It's the same Spirit that unites Father and Son in the holy Trinity. The Father begets the Son in love, the love of the Spirit and the Son is begotten in love by the Father, so also God unites us to himself in love, why and how? By the Spirit, by imparting the Spirit to us and that's the Spirit of love.

Now that Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. It's not just God's Spirit. It's just not the third person of the holy Trinity but it's the Spirit of Christ. So, well, that explains the manner. It explains the whole thing. If you ask why we are called to keep the unity of the Spirit with lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another, the answer is because that's how Christ did it. How did Christ unite the church to himself in love? How did he do that? Yelling and screaming? Calling us names? Wielding a sword? Proud and lifted up? Demanding his rights? "I am meek," he said, "and lowly." "There he comes," says the prophets, "meek and sitting on a colt, the foal of an ass." Humiliation is the one great state of Christ on this earth. You all learned it in the Catechism. Two great states of Christ, humiliation and exaltation. And from his birth until the resurrection there was nothing but humiliation.

Forbearing and longsuffering, longsuffering is to put up with someone who's creating suffering, somebody who's being a pain and causing you pain and trouble, somebody you'd like to hit, somebody you'd like to just get rid of. They're trouble but you suffer long. Is that not Christ?

Forbearance is very closely related. Forbearance emphasizes this, however, to endure under the suffering; to bear up under it. One looks at the suffering, one sees it as suffering, one is literally being burdened by someone else and they bear up under it.

And meekness and lowliness hardly need to be explained. Lowliness is often associated with the mind, what one thinks, and meekness is associated often with the heart. That's the connection. They're basically the same thing but humiliation or humility as it pertains to the mind and the other with the heart. It goes this way, the apostle is going to say, "Don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to think." He even says, "Everyone submit to one another." It's just not that wives have to submit to husbands, you all have to submit to one another. In one way or another even elders must submit to those they rule over. Husbands should submit to their wives. There should be a lowliness of mind in that regard where one looks at himself not as everybody's savior, not as the guy who fixes it for everyone, the one who's going to lead and bring everybody to salvation. No, no, lowliness of mind. Even when God selects someone to certain service, there's a lowliness there. "I don't deserve it. I'm not equipped." And meekness follows right after. Do you know what made Moses the man of God that he was, a man of God so striking that God has to point out he's not the Messiah, he may look like him but he's not? It was his meekness, meeker than anyone on the face of the earth, God says in the book of Numbers.

So now do you see, now do you see why these are the attributes? Because these are the attributes of the Spirit of Christ by which he unites. In other words, God doesn't come to us and say, "Now this is how I unite the church. I'm going to unite the church by my Son, by Christ, by his Spirit, and I'm going to send him in a spirit of humiliation. He's going to lower himself. He's going to be meek. He's going to forbear in longsuffering and now you people once he's done that, you use other methods. You yell and you scream and you divide and you cut asunder, you get things done personally, you take personal offense, that's what you do." No, of course not. Keep the unity in the Spirit in the bond of peace and do it this way because this is the Spirit of Christ, this is the very Spirit of unity, and part of the threat to it is we look at those things and we go, "Pfft, what are they going to do? What in the world is lowliness going to accomplish? What is simply changing the attitude of my mind and being lowly and meek going to do? What does forbearance do when somebody is pounding away and calling me names?" And the answer is it keeps the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is what it does. You may not think so but God does.

Now the importance of all this. I do not need to add to what I said earlier about how urgent this commandment is except simply to repeat it briefly. You all have seen the memes, right, you had one job to do, that's what's basically said here. You all have one job to do. All the others fall under that. All the others need to be lined up under that and none of them may take precedence over it. Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. That's your calling. That's your vocation. The word "vocation," think about it, we use that, we say ministers are called, teachers are called, the rest of us are not called. Oh, yes you are. You all have a calling. You're called as mothers. You're called as fathers. You're called as children. Those are all callings. Those are all vocations but collectively we all have one calling, one great calling, to do this.

Now why? Why is this so important? It's so important that God doesn't even come and say, "Now defend the truth. Therefore having given all these wonderful truths, make sure

that you don't give an inch on the truth of election and don't give an inch with regard to limited atonement and all these truths but do this." Those things are unimportant. Don't forget one Lord, one faith, one baptism. The answer is because this is God's church, it's not yours. About the time that you think it's yours, about the time the minister thinks it's his, about the time the elder thinks it's his, about the time you think it's yours, you are dividing the church. That quick. You may say to yourself, "Well, I'm defending Christ and I love Christ and it's all about Christ." But you divide his church, you're a hypocrite. What good is the head without his body? Here is Christ, you say, "I love Christ and I'm defending Christ and I'm promoting Christ," but you chop the body off from the head or cut the body in pieces? If anybody did that in real life, you'd say that person's crazy. And why would somebody do that? There's a hint. Later on the apostle is going to say, "Husbands, love your wives because your wife is your own body." And he asks that question, "What husband hates his own body?" Yet it happens, there's a husband who sits in front of the mirror, he looks all over his body, he loves his body, takes care of his body, but he hates his wife, he hates his body. That's his real body. It's the same thing with the church. The urgency is that.

Now there's other things the apostle points out too. I mentioned them. He's making a point even in the passage that we read, look, this is necessary for the church to grow up. God is going to give some apostles and evangelists and teachers and all these things, he's going to give all these servants and all of it is to the intention that the church might grow up. It's immature and it needs to grow up to this perfect man in Jesus Christ. In order to do that, it has to remain one, it has to be one, there has to be a unity not only with the church as it is today but with the past, you may even cut yourself off from the church of the past. But ultimately it all comes down to that because this is God's great work. You know, the apostle at one point, the Holy Spirit, is going to look a husband in the eye, look the husband in the eye who's thinking about using his considerable authority and power over his wife to demean and abuse her, and he's going to remind that husband of something, "She belongs to me. She's a fellow heir. In other words, you deal with her, you deal with me." That ought to send chills through any husband. His wife belongs to Christ but how much more so the church? The church isn't yours. It belongs to Christ and what you do to the church, you do to Christ therefore keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father which art in heaven, O Lord our God, we have heard from thy word, we confess our own foolishness in dividing the church and having those attitudes that create division that is our sin and iniquity. Forgive us and by thy Spirit dwell in us and may it be, then, that if the Spirit dwell in us, we do live in lowliness and meekness and longsuffering, forbearing one another in love because is thy church. So grant in Jesus' name. Amen.