

Ephesians 4:1-6 NIV “The worth of unity”

“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.”

Though I often consult dictionaries, I rarely refer to English definitions in my sermons.

We make an exception today for this reason: the variety of opinions about what unity means.

One dictionary used these definitions: Unity – (1) the state or quality of being one (2) the state of being combined with others to form a greater whole (3) harmony or agreement (4) complete accord among persons regarding attitudes, opinions, intentions, etc. (5) math the number one

(6) a harmonious combination of different parts, esp. in art or literature.¹

Has an instance of the 4th definition—“complete accord among persons regarding attitudes, opinions, intentions, etc.” ever occurred?

Achieving that kind of unity is as likely as 100 kindergarten kids happily sharing a single toy.



The Apostle Paul realized that no two people will agree on attitudes, opinions, and intentions.

He and his longtime friend and co-worker Barnabas didn’t concur on taking John Mark with them on their second mission trip.

The young man quit on them before they finished the first trip.

Barnabas and Paul sharply disagreed over whether to take young Mark again.

So what did Paul mean by “unity”?

No one gets excited when hearing the definition of the word unity which Paul used.

The Greeks used unity about the same way we do. That’s not to demean unity.

¹ The Randolph House Dictionary)

Jesus fervently prayed that we be one. Despite his prayer, Christians rarely unify. Jesus followers split into hundreds of denominations.

Virtually denomination divided more.

Each congregation contains members with contrary opinions.

Even family members differ in preferences.

Do you perfectly agree with your closest loved ones and friends?

Yet churches reach their peak potential in unity.

And Jesus fervently prayed for our oneness.

Imagine needing to cut through a tough substance. But when you look at your knife, you realize the blade has more than one edge. Instead, edges go in all directions—crosswise, at angles, some of which have the dull side on the cutting edge.

Your knife is and ugly, useless nightmare.

It can only mangles and destroy.

Church division creates a dreadful picture.

Disunity drastically affects God’s work.

Instead of effectively telling God’s good news, discord twists, contorts, and destroys the good.

You surely agree that conflict creates bad effect.

Think of all the people who quit going because church folks can’t agree or get along.

Other folks refuse to step into worship services because they hear so many church woes.

What is real unity?

Where do we begin to unify?

The scholar Lawrence O. Richards noted that the context of the word unity shapes its meaning.

On the news a few years ago, one channel featured a clip of a local weatherman in the south. As he gave his weather report, he saw something appear on the set. The TV camera didn’t show what it was, but this guy saw it and began screaming like a little kid.

I wondered:

“Did an alligator escape and show up in the studio? Did someone on the set with a gun? Was there a snake? What was happening?”

Turns out it was a bug.

I hope for the guy’s sake it was a giant one.

If you sit on your patio and see a little bug crawling across the grass in your yard, you probably just watch it with interest.

If that bug gets to your leg, you might react to it more strongly.

If that bug gets in your soft drink, you might toss the whole drink.

Swallow that bug, you might really toss it.



The bug's location makes a difference, doesn't it?

That's also true of the word "unity."

To understand unity, we must know what we are and where we are.

Do you recall how the Bible describes us?

Genesis 2:7 tells us that "the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being."²

Go to your yard and dig a few shovelfuls of dirt, which the Bible describes as our essence.

Decades ago someone computed the total worth of all the minerals and elements in an average human body as worth 98 cents.

Prices may now inflate the price considerably.

We might now be worth two-three cups of latte

We are comprised of dirt, spit, and varying amounts of waste, some think politicians and preachers contain excessive amounts of the latter.

Science proves the truth of this statement.

Evidence by the billions abounds.

We like to strut, swagger, and brag about our importance, but 99% of those who lived in previous generations have returned to dust.

² NRSV

Remember what God told Adam: "you are dust, and to dust you shall return"?"³

Genesis clearly states our condition.

Consider how the Lord enclosed this dirt in skin and you could call us "dirt bags."

"But don't we have value?" you ask.

Of course, we do because God made us.

He created each of us a unique, precious being.

But we have no future on our own.

What future does dirt have?

"You are dust, and to dust you shall return."



God's one and only Son, Jesus, came to this planet to give us a future.

- **On the cross, he paid the cost of our mistakes.**
 - **Jesus alone came back from the dead.**
- **And he promised us he'll bring us back, too, even though we might return to dust in the meantime.**

Jesus made us special.

In Ephesians Paul made clear what all Christians should understand.

Jesus worked our salvation for us.

³ Genesis 3:19b NRSV)

No one can earn what Jesus already paid.

His death on the cross covered every mistake of every human being who has ever lived or ever will live.

He bought and paid your eternal life reservation.

If you accepted Christ, were baptized into him, and live for him, God's Holy Spirit now lives in you as God's guarantee of your new existence.

The Bible clearly states:

"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory."⁴

Christ left nothing for us to pay.

We can only try to live more worthy of Jesus' love and more worthy of his Spirit who wants to live in us.

Paul probably wrote Ephesians from prison.

That's likely why he said,

"As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Our two daughters took me to my 55th high school reunion.

They made the travel plans, paid, and booked everything.

I asked one of them about a hotel reservation.

"Dad it's taken care of," she said.

The only thing I can do is try to love those girls, and appreciate them, and treat their mother and their brothers right.

Some time ago, I remembered an incident that happened when I was in first or second grade.

I took a large box of cookies to share with my classmates.

Why I got that gift box, I can't recall. Various classmates had recently shared cookies. I do remember that the cookies were not all the same. Some resembled Oreos and some were single cookies with no frosting. As I distributed the cookies, most of the kids got the single ones-- except a few special friends. My actions did not contribute to class unity.



I wish I could say it was the last time I made a dumb, selfish decision.

What I did is similar to actions that split churches and disrupt unity.

⁴ Ephesians 1:13, 14 NIV

Recall my assertion that the word *unity* by itself doesn't stir excitement?

One NT scholar identified a vital quality of unity.

The subject of oneness, he said, "is often prefaced with humility. When there's a unity problem, it's often caused by an ego."

I read that once before a flight, a stewardess reminded Muhammad Ali to fasten his seat belt. **"Superman don't need no seatbelt,"** replied Ali. Retorted the stewardess, **"Superman don't need no airplane either."** Ali fastened his seat belt.

Ali isn't the only person afflicted by an ego.

We church people often suffer from inflated egos.

That's why our text is vital.

Paul introduced the subject of unity by talking about the need for humility: "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Though people often blame church divisions on big doctrinal issues, I suspect that overly active egos contribute to most church splits.

Note that Paul didn't advise us to have a "little" humility.

He said "Be completely humble?"

The poet Alexander Pope wrote:

**"What dire offense from amorous causes springs,
What mighty contests from trivial things!"
What trivial things split churches?**



- **Paint colors.**
 - **Carpet designs and shades.**
 - **Where and whether to hang chandeliers.**



- **Whose name gets mentioned first.**

In the meantime people die without knowing God's love in Christ.

They never hear the great news that when Jesus returns, God will change these "dirt-bag" bodies of ours into bodies like Jesus' resurrection body.

"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."⁵

⁵ Philippians 3:20, 21 NIV

While church people argue and divide, folks in the world suffer loneliness, hunger, and distress.

That’s why the Bible urges: “Make every effort (be zealous) to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

**We think most of you are making that effort.
We thank God for you.
Join us in praying for greater unity
in Christ our savior.
To God be the glory.**

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