

SERMON NOTES
Ephesians 4:1-16
“Called to Unity and Maturity”

Intro:

- **“There are two things we cannot do alone: one is to be married, and the other is to be a Christian.” (Paul Tournier)**
- **The Christian life is not just *Jesus and me***
- **When you enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ by inviting Him into your life as your Savior and Lord, at that time you become connected with the body of Christ**
- **And it is God’s plan for your spiritual maturity to live out the reality of that connection through active participation in a local church**

Philip Yancey: *“Christianity is not a purely intellectual, internal faith. It can only be lived in community. Perhaps for this reason, I have never entirely given up on church. At a deep level, I sense that church contains something I desperately need. Whenever I abandon church for a time, I find that I am the one who suffers. My faith fades, and a crusty shell of lovelessness grows over me again. I grow colder rather than hotter. And so my journeys away from church have always circled back inside.”*

- Philip Yancey has been wounded by other Christians // he has seen hypocrisy in Christians and has been deeply disappointed by how far some churches fall short of reflecting the likeness of Christ
- *Yet he recognizes how much he needs the local church – imperfect as it is*
- The fact is, most Christians who have been active in a local church for any length of time have been wounded or disappointed at one time or another
- *Nevertheless, it is through the local church that God grows us in spiritual maturity and Christ-likeness*
- **We were made for relationships – with God and with others**
- *In this fallen world filled with sin – we get broken in and through some of those relationships with other sinners*
- **Nevertheless, it is also true that we get healed in and through relationships – with God and with others**
- When you have been wounded by relationship problems, it is tempting to turn for comfort to something else – to work or to alcohol or to casual sex or to food or sports or video games or pornography or fantasy novels or material possessions

- *And those things may provide temporary pleasure or at least relief & distraction from the pain – but they do not heal the wounded places of our heart*
- No one ever became whole by staring at a TV set or a computer screen
- *No one ever became whole by engaging in casual sex or getting drunk or going shopping or overeating or surfing the web for pornographic websites*
- No one ever became whole by running away from or ignoring God

- **We sometimes get broken in and through relationships – but we also get healed in and through relationships**
- Healing comes through knowing God personally and feeling secure in His love
- *And healing comes through relationships in the body of Christ that provide encouragement, hope, caring, forgiveness, grace and unconditional love*
- Are there risks of getting hurt by Christians in churches? Yes
- *But the benefits far outweigh the risks*

- Cornerstone is not a perfect church -- *But we are a church family where many people are finding healing and hope and freedom and new life in Christ*

- **Christianity is all about relationships – This is the nature of a Trinitarian faith – Before the heavens and the earth were created – before there was any other living thing – There was God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – One God in Three Persons – existing in an eternal love relationship**
- From Genesis 1 to Revelation 22 – *our faith is all about relationships*
- **We were created for the praise of His glory – We have been redeemed from sin and death for the praise of His glory – and we display the glory of His grace by living in love and harmony with one another even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in love and harmony with each other**

- We display the glory of His saving grace by *working together in unity and growing together in maturity*
- **And both unity and maturity are all about relationships**

I. THE CALL TO UNITY

- Sometimes we forget or neglect or ignore the horizontal dimension of the message of the Cross
- *But Paul makes it clear in Ephesians 2:*

Ephesians 2:14-16 ¹⁴For Christ himself has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one people. He has broken down the wall of hostility that used to separate us. ¹⁵By his death he ended the whole system of Jewish law that excluded the Gentiles. His purpose was to make peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new person from the two groups. ¹⁶Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death, and our hostility toward each other was put to death.

- *Why did Jesus die on the Cross?*
- **Not only to forgive our sins and to reconcile us to God**
- ***But also to reconcile previously hostile groups of people to each other – uniting them in one body – His body***

- ***And the church's high calling is to display God's wisdom and the glory of His grace – not only to non-Christian people on earth but even to the spiritual and demonic powers in the unseen world (Eph. 3:10)***
- *How?*
- **By displaying our spiritual unity in Christ in the context of the local church**

Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

- *What is this calling?*

(1) Walking Worthy of Our Calling: Christian Unity is the Visible Evidence of Salvation

In the plan of God, it is up to the church to demonstrate the reality of the reconciling power of the Cross by means of church unity

-therefore, to live a life worthy of the calling means first of all:

Ephesians 4:3 (NIV) ³Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

This is a call to a visible unity among flesh-and-blood, imperfect believers
-and, in the first century, there was only one church in each city
-and in that one church in each city were Jewish and Gentile believers /
charismatic and non-charismatic believers / light-skinned and dark-skinned
believers / affluent and low-income believers / young and old believers

—in that one church were *believers who drank wine and believers who didn't drink alcohol / believers who sang only Jewish psalms and believers who created their own new hymns and songs*

–That kind of spiritual unity is just not natural

--We affiliate naturally with people who share our same interests or hobbies or education or economic status or political opinions or moral values or ethnic heritage or stage in family life or children's activities – something in common to bind us together

But God delights in taking people who have little or nothing in common – *except faith in Jesus Christ* – and then binding them together by the love of Jesus Christ –*the more diversity that exists in a church body, the greater the opportunity for God to be glorified by their unity* – because the more obvious it will be that the unity is due to Jesus Christ and not due to natural affinities and cultural similarities

But many Christians are working at cross-purposes with God – looking for a sub-group within the body of Christ where they can feel most comfortable with believers who are most like them

-and so, whites seek out other whites, and blacks seek out other blacks / and charismatics seek out other charismatics, and non-charismatics seek out other non-charismatics / and affluent families seek out other affluent families, and low-income people seek out other low-income people / and conservatives seek out other conservatives, and liberals seek out other liberals / and believers who prefer contemporary songs congregate together, and those who prefer traditional hymns congregate together

But God did not design the church to be like a fraternity organization where people choose to associate with each other based on common interests

-rather, the church is to be like an extended family – you don't get to choose your brothers and sisters / but you have to love them and get along with them anyway

Philip Yancey: *“Family is the one human institution we have no choice over. We get in simply by being born, and as a result we are involuntarily thrown together with a menagerie of strange and unlike people. Church calls for another step: to voluntarily choose to band together with a strange menagerie because of a common bond in Jesus Christ. I have found that such a community more resembles a family than any other human institution. Henri Nouwen once defined a community as “a place where the person you least want to live with, always lives.” His definition applies equally to the family group that gathers around the table each Thanksgiving and the church that congregates each Sunday morning.”*

The NT teaches that Christian unity is not the result of believers segregating themselves into the right sub-groups of like-minded people / *but rather unity is the result of strange and unlike people being thrown together into God's family – and then loving one another in the midst of all their differences*

-the more diversity that exists in a church family, the more the unity of that church family will glorify God because it will be a spiritual unity rather than a sociological unity

(2) Relational Qualities that Safeguard Christian Unity

Ephesians 4:1-3 ¹Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

The more diverse a congregation is, the more these character qualities of Christ will be necessary to maintain church unity

-notice that when Paul exhorts us to live a life worthy of our calling, he begins by instructing us to be completely humble and gentle

- What would happen if a random survey were taken in the Quad Cities or any other community in our country and people were asked: *When you think of conservative Christians, which characteristics pop into your mind first?*
- And if they based their impression of conservative Christians on letters to the editor and conservative talk radio and culture wars rhetoric...
- *Would humility and gentleness be the first characteristics most people would mention?*
- Or what about school teachers or administrators or coaches or school board members or politicians who have had contacts with conservative Christians? *Humility and gentleness – is that what we are known for?*
- **When we act obnoxiously and repulsively while fighting for the truth – all we succeed in doing is to make the truth repulsive to most people**
- Charles Colson (passionate defender of Christian truth): *“We advance the truth of the Gospel by Love”*
- When we evaluate what we read and listen to and allow into our minds – we need to evaluate not only the truth content, but also the tone and attitude

- *Is what I am listening to or reading developing within me greater humility, gentleness, patience, compassion, and kindness – or is it stimulating fear, anger, self-righteous pride, rudeness, disrespect, and a hypercritical spirit?*

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV) ¹⁵But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Colossians 4:5-6 ⁵Make the most of your chances to tell others the Good News. Be wise in all your contacts with them. ⁶Let your conversation be gracious as well as sensible, for then you will have the right answer for everyone.

- *The problem with many of us is that because we know where truth is to be found – in the Bible and in Jesus Christ – therefore we think we have the right answer for everything under the sun*
- *Whether the issue be a disputable doctrinal matter or controversial issues such as health care reform – we think we have God’s mind on every subject – and we equate our opinions with God’s truth – and then demonize those who disagree with our views*
- *And we display this combative attitude not only toward non-Christians who often oppose biblical truth and values – but we take it into the church as well*

What is it that causes discord and disunity between church members and between churches?

-in church history there have been a handful of church battles that were fought over the essential core truths of the Gospel

-the other 98% of church conflicts can be traced back to the disposition to assert personal rights and convictions, and then people become offended and angry and resentful when they don’t get their own way

-we assume that our way is the right way / our interpretation is the only interpretation / our preferences are the best / our agenda is the most important / our needs are the most pressing / and our convictions are closest to God’s truth

And the result of our stubborn pride and prejudices is discord

-and the antidote is to be completely humble and gentle

- *In order to relate to one another with humility and gentleness, we must renounce self-centeredness, self-importance, harsh & demeaning language, and the tyranny of our own rights and agendas*

And then, Paul goes on to say “*Be patient, bearing with one another in love*”

-Patience and forbearance are essential to church unity, because in any group of human beings there are going to be some persons who have personalities or opinions that you find annoying – or even offensive

-(Likewise, some people probably find you to be occasionally annoying)

Indeed, it is precisely this necessity of having to fellowship with annoying people in the body of Christ that gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to produce the character of Christ in you

-in order to grow in your capacity to love, you need to rub shoulders with some people who are disagreeable and annoying and hard-to-get-along-with

One of the most destructive cancers in the body of Christ is offended Christians nursing grudges against one another

-some Christians are quick to take offense and slow to forgive

-to be patient, bearing with one another in love means surrendering to God your right to stay offended

-Love is not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs

The German philosopher Schopenhauer compared the human race to a bunch of porcupines huddling together on a cold winter's night. He said, "The colder it gets outside, the more we huddle together for warmth; but the closer we get to one another, the more we hurt one another with our sharp quills."

In any church you will occasionally get poked by a few sharp quills from some other church member

-in response, you can drop out of church and stay home and become spiritually cold and immature

-or you can look for another church where maybe the porcupines have softer quills, only to discover later that porcupines are porcupines pretty much wherever you go

-or Christ offers this alternative: you can forgive each other for the pokes you receive – and by bearing with one another in love, we can stay together and stay warm

(3) The Theological Basis for Christian Unity

Ephesians 4:4 - 6 (NIV) ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called— ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Our unity is a spiritual unity – created by the Holy Spirit indwelling the body of Christ / it is the unity of one family with one Father / it is the unity based on our confession that Jesus is Lord

-What unites us is our common faith in Jesus Christ as God in human flesh, whose death and resurrection are God's only provision for sinners being reconciled to God

-that is the core truth of the Gospel

-and everyone who believes that core truth of the Gospel is a child of God

-and everyone whom God accepts as a son or daughter through faith in Jesus Christ, we must accept as our brother or sister in Christ

- ***We are not called to establish Christian unity – it already exists – given by God – rooted in the Trinity and in the Gospel and in our salvation experience***
- ***We are called to value and maintain that God-given unity – to value that unity more than our egotistical desire to set ourselves apart from other believers by claiming that we are more biblical or more spiritual or more whatever – and that we could not possibly stoop to worship and fellowship and serve with such inferior Christians***
- **According to the Bible, the theological basis for Christian unity is rather minimal:**
- ***Are we united in believing that there is one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit?***
- ***Are we united in believing that Jesus Christ is Lord and that He has saved us from sin and death through faith in his Cross and Resurrection?***
- ***Are we united in being baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit – and being baptized by the Holy Spirit into one body of Christ?***
- **Then that is enough to agree on in order to be one in Christ**
- ***Our Father in heaven has only one family and He accepts into that family everyone who trusts in His Son for salvation***
- ***Our Lord Jesus Christ has only one body – and the one Spirit baptizes everyone who confesses Jesus as Lord into that one body of Christ***
- ***If we have the same Lord, believe the same gospel, and have experienced the same reality of being baptized into Christ – that is enough to make us one in Christ – and our calling then is to live out this unity in real-life relationships in local churches***
- **We do not need to agree on politics or spiritual gifts or the timing of the Rapture and Tribulation or the role of women in the church or which version of the Bible to use or the age of the earth or music preferences or home schooling or Christian schools or public education**
- ***If we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – then we are members of one body of Christ and are commanded to live out the reality of that unity***

- **When we segregate from one another over these secondary, non-essential disputable matters – we are not defending truth – rather we are violating truth and disobeying our calling**
- ***Our oneness is in Christ alone – not Christ AND similar doctrinal views – not Christ AND similar political views – not Christ AND similar socio-economic status – not Christ AND similar worship preferences***
- ***The more our unity is based on sociological sameness and agreement on secondary doctrinal issues – and therefore less on the sole basis of faith in Jesus Christ alone – then the less our unity brings glory to God***
- **But the more diversity that exists in a church – the more God is glorified in their unity – because that unity is in Christ alone**

II. THE CALL TO MATURITY

- ***Diversity is essential to our spiritual maturity in Christ-likeness***
- **Therefore, no matter how hard you try to fellowship only with people who are just like you – in every church – *by God's design* – you will have to put up with some differences caused by different God-given gifts**

(1) Team Effort: Differentiated by Christ's Grace-Gifts

Ephesians 4:7-8 ⁷However, Christ has given each of us special abilities—whatever he wants us to have out of his rich storehouse of gifts. ⁸The psalmist tells about this, for he says that when Christ returned triumphantly to heaven after his resurrection and victory over Satan, he gave generous gifts to men.

- **The most valuable gift the risen and ascended Christ has given us is the Holy Spirit Himself**
- ***Spiritual gifts – or grace-gifts (the word for spiritual gifts comes from the root word for grace) – are manifestations of the gift of the Holy Spirit***
- **The Holy Spirit – the Paraclete – is by nature an Encourager – *the gift of encouragement is a manifestation of that nature***
- **The Holy Spirit is by nature a Teacher and Leader – *the gifts of teaching and leadership are manifestations of the Spirit's nature***
- **The Holy Spirit is by nature a Merciful Healer – *the gifts of mercy and healing are manifestations of that nature***
- **All the fullness of Deity resides in Christ in human flesh – only Christ fully and completely and perfectly manifests all of the divine nature of God**

- ***But to every believer in the body of Christ is given some manifestation of some aspect of the divine nature of the Spirit of God***

1 Corinthians 12:4 - 7 (NIV) ⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

- ***A spiritual gift is a manifestation of the Spirit or an ability given to do a particular ministry or a tool by which God works through us to build up the body of Christ***
- ***But it is the same Lord we are serving and the same Spirit who is empowering us to serve in different ways***
- ***We share a common faith in the same Lord and the same Gospel – but we are differentiated from one another by our different gifts***
- ***None of us reflects the fullness of Christ or carries out the ministry of Christ single-handedly – we need all the different gifts of all the members of the body to do that***
- ***And who determines which gifts are given to which members and to which churches?***
- ***The pastor? The Deacons? The Vision Team?***
- ***I've been a pastor for over 30 years – not once has the Lord come to me and said: You know, Scott, you and your leaders know the needs and culture of your church better than I do – so what gifts should I give – or not give – to this church at this time?***

Ephesians 4:7 (NIV) ⁷But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

1 Corinthians 12:11 (NIV) ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

- ***God is God, and we are not – when it comes to determining which gifts a church receives***

(2) Leaders Equipping Saints for Works of Service

- ***If church leaders do not determine which gifts a church receives, then what is their role in relation to gifts in the church?***

Ephesians 4:11-13 ¹¹He is the one who gave these gifts to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹²Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ, ¹³until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ.

- *Here the gifts are referring not to special abilities primarily – but rather to church leaders*
- **God gives church leaders as gifts to build up the body of Christ**
- **My job description is spelled out quite clearly here: *I am to shepherd the flock (pastor), I am to teach God's people the truth of the Gospel (teacher), and I am to "equip the saints to do works of service" – equip the believers in the church to do the Lord's work and to build up the church body***
- **How do Christians and churches grow in Christ-likeness and become mature manifestations of the fullness of Christ?**
- *Churches grow in Christ-likeness and in ministry effectiveness when the "saints" – the believers – use their spiritual gifts to do the Lord's work*
- **So, in addition to teaching the Word – what is the responsibility of the pastors?**
- *To equip the members of the body to carry out the ministry functions that God has called and gifted them to do*
- *Whether God has given you a gift of encouragement or teaching or leadership or service or giving or mercy or faith or wisdom or discerning of spirits or healing or prophecy or helps or administration or evangelism – my job is to equip you to use your gifts to help our church grow and mature in the fullness of Christ*
- **One of the ways that Mark and I help you to grow spiritually and to be effective in serving the Lord is by teaching the Christian Life and Service Seminars**
- **CLASS 201 – *Blueprint for Maturity* – is being offered Tuesday evening, Oct. 6 and is a prerequisite for CLASS 301 – *Blueprint for Ministry* – which will be offered in late October or early November**
- *Following CLASS 301 you will have the opportunity to complete a spiritual gifts inventory and then to meet individually with me or Mark for a personal consultation to help you discover and use your spiritual gifts*
- **God has made it clear on several occasions to the Vision Team that understanding, accepting, developing and using our spiritual gifts will be**

essential to fulfilling the God-sized ministry assignment that He is revealing to us in the vision process

- ***We will grow in spiritual maturity and in fulfilling our mission in the world as each member of the body is equipped to use their gifts to do the Lord's work***

(3) Growing Up in Christ as Each Part does its Work in Love

Ephesians 4:15-16 ¹⁵⁻¹⁶ Instead, we will lovingly follow the truth at all times—speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly—and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of his body, the Church. Under his direction, the whole body is fitted together perfectly, and each part in its own special way helps the other parts, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.

None of us can ever single-handedly express the whole measure of the fullness of Christ *-but within the church there will be some who reflect certain of his qualities, others who reflect other qualities / some minister with certain of his gifts, others minister with others of his gifts / some express part of his heart's passion, others express other parts of his heart's passion*

-together, as a body, we can grow toward attaining the whole measure of the fullness of Christ -- **but only if each part does its work**

Each one of you is a part of the body of Christ

-you reflect the Person of Christ differently than anyone else can

-without your involvement, that part of the body is missing, and our church's ability to experience and reflect the fullness of Christ is handicapped

You need the church in order to grow up into Christ-like maturity

-and the church needs you to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

- *Every member – and every gift – that God gives to our church body is given with a purpose*
- *Every member – and every gift – is needed to help each of you to grow into Christ-like maturity – and to help our church body to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ*

(Conclusion):

“There are two things we cannot do alone: one is to be married, and the other is to be a Christian.”

Will you commit yourself today to doing your part to help Cornerstone Baptist Church 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?

-make a membership commitment to Cornerstone

-attend CLASS 201 Blueprint for Maturity and CLASS 301 Blueprint for Ministry

-protect the unity of our church – by acting in love toward other members / by refusing to gossip / by following our church leaders

-pray for the health and growth of our church / invite the unchurched to attend / warmly welcome those who visit

-attend worship faithfully / live a godly life at home, at work, and in the community / and give regularly to the ministry & mission of Cornerstone

-get involved in deploying your gifts in the ministries and outreaches of Cornerstone

- We are going to close by singing “*In Christ Alone*”
- *All the core truths of the Gospel are found in this one hymn*
- This hymn expresses the theological basis for our unity in Christ
- *It is enough – believing this Gospel together is enough to make us one in Christ*
- Anything else we might disagree about is a secondary matter and cannot be allowed to threaten our unity
- *We are called to make every effort to keep this unity of the Spirit with everyone else who calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus to be saved*
- **In doing so – with all humility and gentleness and patience and bearing with one another in love -- we will live a life worthy of the high calling to which we have been called – we will glorify God by demonstrating the reconciling power of the Cross of Christ**

Prayer

“In Christ Alone”