

Notes: God's Call to Christian Unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Intro: "Therefore" signals a new major section in this letter. Paul's gospel follows a particular "grammar." Chapters 1-3 contain statements in which the verbs are almost exclusively in the indicative mood: they tell us what God has done for us "in Christ." In fact only once in the first three chapters does Paul urge us to do anything—to "remember" what we once were but no longer are (2:11). By contrast, the second part of the letter is full of imperatives. Paul's "gospel grammar" teaches us this: everything he urges us to do (4:1ff.) is dependent on everything he has told us God has already done (1:2ff.). Our obedience is a response of faith to God's prior grace and power. Four times in these verses it's said that believers have been "called" (indicative/what God has done) by God (cf. Eph. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:13-14). In other words, having convinced them of their sin and misery, enlightened their minds in understanding that Jesus was crucified as a payment for their sins (Col. 2:13-14), God powerfully renewed their wills and enabled them to receive Jesus freely offered in the gospel. What is a basic responsibility of those so powerfully called? Unity in love. How significant that of all possible starting places, Paul starts here! Refusing to live in a reconciled state with our brothers and sisters is a practical denial of our call and the power of God working in us!

#1: United by forbearing love (1-2). Just as Christ called Lazarus forth from his tomb to walk in newness of life (Jn. 11), God has called believers in the gospel from their tomb of spiritual death to walk in newness of life. What characterizes newness of life? The walk of love (cf. 5:2). Believers should be assured of the depths of God's love for them—his eternal, electing, and predestinating love (chapter 1). They must be assured of the dimensions of God's love for them which corresponds to those of Christ's cross (3:18). But what fruit must the assurance of God's love bear in the believer's life? Forbearing love toward our brothers and sisters! Paul describes this love with a triad of Spiritual graces. Who can deny that these graces were revealed most perfectly in Jesus Christ whose human nature God has "called" us to reflect (Gal 4:19)? We are those in whom God is able to do far more abundantly than all we can ask or think according to the power that is at work in us (3:20-21). To refuse to walk with all humility, gentleness, and patience is a practical refusal of the Christlikeness God has called us to reflect. Humility. Lowliness of mind produced by the deep awareness that everything we have and are, everything we accomplish is because of God's grace to us in Christ. Gentleness. That grace of the soul which makes a believer unwilling to provoke others and not easy to provoke or offend with one's weaknesses and faults. Gentleness is opposed to angry resentments and spitefulness. Patience. The root meaning of Paul's Greek term literally means "long-souled." We must take a "long-term" view of a fellow Christian as a "work in progress" and remember gratefully that God in Christ has been long souled and patient with us.

#2: United by the same identity (4a). We must be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" in part because "there is one body and one Spirit." This is not an exhortation but a declaration of our identity which has great relevance for our unity. One of the most conspicuous features of our world is not merely that differences characterize us but that our differences often divide us. All things which make us different create opportunities for enmity and hostility. But it must not be so in the church because though we are different according we are also united to the same body and indwelt by the same Spirit. United to the same body. Over and over, Paul says that if the idea of the church is to be grasped, it must be seen as a body. This emphasis has many practical applications. For instance, when someone is converted to faith in

Jesus, he is no longer primarily from PA, NY, etc. No longer primarily of a particular ethnicity, no longer primarily of a particular economic class, etc. More basic than all these ways we are accustomed to categorizing ourselves, a Christian is a member of the body of Christ. Indwelt by the same Spirit. Just as a human body has one spirit that animates it, so there is one Spirit of God who joins us to Christ, renews us and indwells us. This higher oneness should encourage peace between believers. We should see the irrelevance of many human distinctions which separate human hearts.

#3: United by the same hope (4b-6). “Hope” is the Christian’s basic outlook. He looks back to the cross and empty tomb by salvation was won for him. He looks forward to meeting Christ beyond this world, to the resurrection of his body, to the joy of being with Christ in glory forever. This is the common hope which unites true believers. It is founded on: One Lord. One Lord Jesus whose body we are. One faith. One body of apostolic teaching. One Baptism. One sign and seal of communion with God by the Father’s election, the Son’s redemption, the Spirit’s regeneration. One God and Father. One sovereign heavenly Father to whom we have access by the blood and Spirit. Let us see our brother as one for whom Christ died and in whom Christ lives. Of inestimable value to God!