

Ephesians 4:4-6

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The Ties that Bind

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Ken Hughes relates the story that was attributed originally to Dwight Pentecost. Pentecost tells the story of a church that was here in the Dallas area; a church that became bitterly divided over a particular issue. And the divisiveness got so bad that eventually, both sides sued and countersued to gain control of the church property and to force the other side out. Apparently, they'd never read 1 Corinthians 6. But that's what they did. And of course, as you might expect, it made all of the local papers to the delight of many readers. When the judge was to entertain the case, the judge punted. He ruled that it was not a civil matter, but was an ecclesiastical one, and should be decided by the leaders of the denomination. So, on the appointed day, the leaders of that particular denomination in which this church was, met to hear arguments from both sides of this contentious debate. Eventually, after hearing both sides, the denominational leaders made a decision. And they awarded the church to one of the sides in this debate.

You know, of course, what the other side did. They went down the street and started another church. But the Dallas newspapers reported, (after that denominational court, of a sorts, had met and discerned what to do) the Dallas newspapers reported that finally, in that hearing, they had gotten to the bottom of what was the source of this contentious rift, the original cause of the battle. And they discovered that the entire battle, shockingly, had begun at a church dinner. And here's the really surprising part. It all began, (and I'm not making this up) it all began when someone served a smaller piece of ham to one of the leaders than to the child seated next to that leader. Apparently, it was a calculated slight by one of the members toward the leadership because of some issue on which they disagreed. And there it went. (Must have been some piece of ham.) I guess the lesson, here, is: "Always serve the elders, as they go through the line at church gatherings, larger servings of whatever it is that we're eating."

Obviously, that kind of division and disunity brings a reproach on the name of Jesus Christ. It is unacceptable to the Lord of the church. And Paul wants the Ephesians and us to know that. And he wants us to know that we must expend every effort to preserve the unity of the church. This is the message of Ephesians, chapter Four in the first paragraph that we're examining together.

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Let me just remind you of the context. Ephesians 4:1 is kind of a hinge verse. It is the topic sentence of the rest of the book. It is an overarching command to walk in a manner worthy of our calling. The first three chapters detail our calling. And now, he's going to tell us how to walk in a way, how to live in a way, that reflects well on that calling. And the very first way to walk worthy, he says, is to live in unity in the church. That's the theme of the paragraph that begins in 4:2, and runs all the way down through 16. As we've noted, verse 3 is really the core of that paragraph. Look at it with me, "Being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." You see, there is already this unity that exists. You didn't create it. I didn't create it. The Holy Spirit created it when we became believers. There is this unity that exists. And we are to be diligent, verse 3 says, to preserve that unity. The rest of this paragraph tells us how. In verses 2-16, Paul provides us with three means for preserving that unity.

Last time, that we studied together, we looked at the first means. It's found in verse 2. "Put on the attitudes of unity. Put on the attitudes of unity." There are certain attitudes that serve as the kind of Petri dish in which unity thrives and grows. Verse 2 says those attitudes are "humility and gentleness and patience and tolerating the flaws and weaknesses of others, in love." If we're going to have unity as a church, then we must foster those attitudes. Frankly, if we're going to have unity in any relationship, we have to foster those attitudes in spirit that spirit.

Now that brings us today, to the next part of this paragraph, and to the second means for preserving unity in the church. Not only must we put on the attitudes of unity. But we must also focus on the basis of our unity. Focus on the basis of our unity. Now this second means to promoting and preserving our unity is found in verses 4 - 6. And, as with the first, this second means will also take all of our time together this morning. We're just going to look at focusing on the Basis of our Unity in verses 4 - 6. Let me read for you verses 16, in the interest of time. Just remember that the paragraph runs all the way down through 16. And we'll look at those verses in the future. 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, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to

preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Paul wants us to know that the unity that you and I enjoy is not something that we just pretend exists. Our unity is based on a very specific foundation. It has an objective basis. In verses 4 - 6 Paul provides us with a list of seven realities, seven realities that provide the true basis of our unity. Specifically, these are the seven foundation stones on which true unity is built. These are the seven pillars on which all true unity rests. Where these are present, there is unity whatever other differences there may be. But where these are not present, any attempts at unity will be artificial. They'll only be façade. There won't be genuine, spiritual unity. So, let's look at these seven, together, briefly. They are the basis for the unity that you and I enjoy.

The first basis, or foundation, for our unity, is found at the beginning of verse 4: we share a common life. We share a common life. Verse 4 says, "One body." One body. That's a common New Testament metaphor for the Church. He's saying, "The church is like a human body." We are all organically united to Christ, as the Head, and to each other as other members of the body in our physical bodies, are united. We share a common life. One of your hands shares the same life with the hand that's extended on the other arm. The same with every member of your body: they are organically united; and they share a common life. Therefore, it is to the benefit of every part and member of your body to preserve the other parts, because they are organically united together. They share a common life.

Paul has made this point already, back in Ephesians 2, you remember, when he talks about our being reconciled by Christ. He says, verse 16 of Ephesians 2: "Christ's goal was to reconcile both those who were far away (the Gentiles), and those who were near (the Jews), in one body, to God, through the cross. It was God's intention to unite us together, as the members of a body are united Romans 12:5 says, "We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually, members of one another." You are every bit as united to the people sitting around you, as the various members of your body are united to the other members of your physical body.

When our bodies, when our human, physical bodies turn on themselves, we call it a disease. There are various autoimmune disorders, in which the body attacks its own cells. And when that happens, it's not what's supposed to happen. It's a disease. It's an illness. It is contrary to God's original design and His purpose for your human body. And folks, the same is true in the church! It makes no sense when one member of the body turns on the other members. We share a common life, an interconnection that demands that we are unified.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul uses this very point as an argument for unity. First Corinthians 12, you remember, the passage, verse 12, "For even as the body is one (now he's talking of the human body) even as your body is one, and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ!" It's the same way in the spiritual world. It's the same way in the church. It functions just like your physical body in this way. He goes on to say, verse 13: "For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit." We share a common life.

And because of that (he goes on to argue), it makes no sense, verse 15, for the foot to say, "Because I'm not a hand, I'm not a part of the body;" or for one part to say, "I've got a better position than the other parts." That sort of disunity makes no sense in the physical body. And it makes no sense in the spiritual body that is the church, either. That's the point Paul wants us to get. In fact, over in verse 24, he says,

... But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to the *member* which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but *that* the members may have the same care for one another. And if *one* member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are Christ's body, and individually, members of it!

Folks, this is a picture, intended to communicate a spiritual reality. We are one body. We share a common life, and that should drive us to unity.

There's a second basis of our unity, also found in verse 4: we share a common source. We share a common source, a common origin. Verse 4 says, "One Spirit." One Spirit. The word, "spirit" can mean the human spirit, or soul. Or it can mean the Holy Spirit. Here, the translators obviously understood it to be the Holy Spirit, so they capitalized it, in our *New American Standard* translations. Why did they do that? Well, notice in verse 5, there's a reference to Christ as "Lord." And in verse 6, there's a reference to the Father. So, it is almost certainly, then, in verse 4, a reference to the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit is mentioned.

But that raises the question: "How does the Spirit serve as a basis for our unity?" Well, it's because through the work of that one Spirit, we are Christians. All of us are members of that one body, because of the one Spirit, who called us, and who lives within us. A moment ago, I read 1 Corinthians 12:13: "for by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and were all made to drink of one Spirit." There is one source, folks to why you we are all in Christ! There is only one origin. And it's the work of the Holy Spirit!

James Boyce makes the point that, when we retell the story of our conversion, we tend to concentrate on the differences of how we came to faith in Christ. And that's fine, and as it should be. Tonight, we'll have testimonies of those who'll be baptized. And, as they share their testimonies, they'll explain how, in unique ways, God brought them to Himself. But the truth is: the similarities are more profound and greater than the differences! It's through the work of the Holy Spirit that each one of us was convicted of sin! It's through His work! We were regenerated, given new life! We were enabled to believe! We were declared righteous with God! And it's through the ongoing work of the same Spirit that every one of us is being made progressively more holy! That should unite us together! We are united because of a common source! A common source lies behind the changes that are occurring in every one of us! One Spirit! We are all the work of One Spirit: The Spirit of God!

There's a third reality here in Ephesians 4 that serves as the basis of our unity: we share a common future; we share a common future. Verse 4 ends, "one Hope." Or, actually, he makes it

more full than that. “Just as also you were called in one hope of your calling.” As we have learned, this idea of “calling” (we’ve seen it before in Ephesians) is the sovereign call of God, through the Gospel, that is “effective,” or as theologians would call it, “effectual.” It’s when a person hears the Gospel message, and is drawn through that message, inexorably, compellingly, irresistibly to God. If you’re a Christian, that has happened to you. You have been called in that way, through the Gospel message, to God. And when that happened, when God called you to Himself, He gave you a hope that was produced by that calling.

Now, I’ve told you before, this word, “hope” is a very confusing one, if you think in English; because the English word, “hope” has very little in common with the Greek word, “hope.” If you don’t get English the English concept of “hope” out of your mind, you will be hopelessly confused. O.K.? So, think of it like this: the English word, “hope” is primarily “desire for something to happen.” “I ‘hope’ my team will win.” Usually, you have that expression when, there isn’t a chance in the world they’re going to win. “I hope. I have this desire.”

The Greek word for “hope” combines desire with absolute certainty. It includes both the desire for something to happen, and the absolute certainty that it will! When God called us, He gave us a hope like that. A desire for something that is still future, but is so absolutely certain, that it’s as if it has already happened! We saw it Ephesians 1:18, you remember? Paul prayed. He said, “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know. You’ll understand the hope to which He’s called you the hope of His calling!

We all share this hope. What is this hope? Well, if you follow this word, “hope” in the New Testament, you discover what it is that we hope for. We hope for salvation for ultimate spiritual rescue. We hope for righteousness. We hope for resurrection. We hope for the redemption of our body. We hope for eternal life. We hope for Christ’s return. We hope for sharing God’s glory! All of those expressions occur in the New Testament. In other words, let me put it to you in these terms. Every one of us who are in Christ has both the desire for, and the absolute certainty guaranteed to us that we will be rescued from the penalty, power, and presence of sin; that we will enjoy someday comprehensive, personal righteousness and holiness; that we will have a redeemed body that doesn’t decay and doesn’t get ill, and doesn’t lead us into sin; and

doesn't die; that we will lead a higher quality of life that is unaffected by the passing of time: a quality of life in which we can commune with the living God.

We have a hope of Christ's return! He's coming again to receive us to Himself! And we will forever share His glory! That's our hope! Paul's point in Ephesians 4:4 is that we are all united around that common hope for the future. Now when you first hear that the future is a source of unity, it seems a bit strange. Because, perhaps, the one biblical issue on which most Christians can most disagree, is the issue of the future. You know, there's pre-millennialism, and there's A-millennialism, and there's post-millennialism. And there's, as my father-in-law liked to say, "Pan-millennialism (It'll all pan out in the end.)! There's pre-tribulation Rapture, and mid-tribulation Rapture, and post-tribulation Rapture.

But folks, although we may be divided on many things about the future, we are united on the most important. All true Christians are united on the fact, that to be "absent from the body is to be in God's presence;" that Jesus will return, literally, and bodily to gather His own to Himself; that we will be made perfect in our souls, so that we will bear the imprint of His moral character; and we will receive glorified bodies, like His glorified body; and that we will enjoy His presence in a new heavens and a new earth for all eternity! That's our hope! That's what we desire! And that's what's absolutely certain! And it serves as the basis for our unity; our common hope for the future.

So, we share a common life. We share a common source: the Spirit of God. We share a common future.

The fourth basis of our unity is: that we share a common Master. We share a common Master. Look at verse 5, "one Lord." The Greek word for "Lord" is a word you've heard before. It's the word, "kurios." It simply means "Master". Where there is, in the ancient world, or in the New Testament, a "kurios", or a "master", there is always a "dulos", or a "slave". Those Christians, sitting in that little church in Ephesus, reading or hearing this letter read for the first time, would've understood this image, perfectly. We are all, as Christians, fellow slaves. And we all serve together one Kurios: one Master. And if there's any doubt in your mind as to who Paul

thinks that Lord, or Master is, turn back to Ephesians 1:1. He makes it clear, right up front: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus, the Messiah, by the will of God.” “Christ” is not a name, by the way. “Christ” is a title: “Christos.” It’s the Greek form of the Hebrew, “Ha Mashiyach,” the Messiah. Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. And he goes on to say, “To the saints who are at Ephesus, who are the faithful in Jesus, the Messiah: Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Master, Jesus, the Messiah.” That’s our one “kurios”, our one Master, our one Lord.

We are fellow slaves, serving together. And our unity is based on the fact that we share the same Master! We’re not at cross-purposes, because we’re all trying to serve the same Person! This is how we came into faith. Paul, in Romans 10, you remember that passage that we quote often: Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as LORD, as Kurios, as Master, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” That’s how we got in: was acknowledging Jesus as “Master!”

Over in Romans 14, the passage we studied just a few months ago, and the issue of Christian liberty. In Romans 14:8, Paul makes this point. He says, “If we live, we live for the Kurios! If we die, we die for the Kurios! Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the “Kurioses”! We are the Master’s! We belong to Him! In the same, sort of context, over in 1 Corinthians 8, also in the context of Christian liberty, Paul makes this point. First Corinthians 8:6, “For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him; and one Lord, Jesus, the Messiah, by whom are all things, and we exist through Him.” But there’s one there’s one Kurios!

So, stop judging your brother! You’re a fellow slave! Let the Kurios decide. It is this reality of a common Master that sweeps away all the differences between us. Folks, you and I are very different. We come from different backgrounds. In some cases, we have different ethnicities. We have different ideas different, perhaps, perspectives on various passages. There’re a lot of things that are different about us. But those differences are swept away by this reality. In Galatians 3, Galatians 3:28, Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek,” (There go the ethnic differences.) “There is neither slave nor free man.” (There go the societal differences.) “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Jesus, the Messiah.” You all stand before Him on

the same equal, spiritual footing. There may be different roles in the marriage, or in the church; but spiritually, we all stand before God as equals! All of those differences are swept away.

Why? Because, verse 29, “you belong to Christ!” He’s the Kurios! We are the slaves.

Now, folks, this means, that with those who embrace the same Master, we ARE united. But there can be no unity, on the other hand, with those who serve a different master, even if they claim to serve the same Master! For example, the Mormons say they worship Jesus. They come to my door, as they come to yours, and talk about the fact that we, we worship and serve the same Jesus. Folks, it’s not the same master. It’s not the same Jesus! Their Jesus is the physical offspring of a physical union between God and a woman. He is the spirit-brother of Satan. He is not the eternal Son of God, the second member of the Trinity, forever equal with God! He’s not the same master.

There are other cults and other faiths, who say they respect Jesus. But it’s not the Jesus of the New Testament. So, we do not we cannot have unity with them! Only with those who serve the same Master. With those who serve the same Lord, we are inseparably united!

There’s a fifth reality that serves as the basis for our unity: we share a common Gospel. We share a common Gospel. Notice, verse 5 says, “one faith.” One faith. Sometimes in the New Testament, the word “faith” is used subjectively: that is, of the act of believing. “My faith,” or “Your faith.” “Your believing.” “My believing.” Here Paul uses the word objectively. He uses it in the same sense as when Jude writes, “Contend for the faith.” In other words, he uses one faith in the sense that it’s “the faith”. There is a body of doctrine that we all share, that we’re all united in. Paul loves this expression. He uses it often. Let me show you just a couple of ‘em.

Turn to 1 Timothy 3, 1 Timothy 3:9. He’s talking about the deacons and their qualifications, and he says, (verse 9), “They must hold to the mystery of the faith (that body of doctrine).” They must hold to it. Chapter 4:1, the Spirit explicitly says, “In latter times, some will fall away from the faith.” (Not their faith). They’ll fall away from the faith: the body of doctrine. Verse 6 makes the same point. “You need to be nourished on the words of the faith.”

But look over at Titus 1; because here, I think, Paul puts it very clearly He addresses Titus. And he says in 1:4 of Titus: “To Titus, my true child in a common faith.” We hold a common faith. That is, there is a body of doctrine to which we both cling, and in which we both agree. We may disagree about small interpretations of various passages. You and I may disagree about what the ten toes on the beast mean in Daniel. We may disagree on substantive issues: issues like the nature of the millennium, or the nature of baptism.

But there are certain fundamentals that all true Christians believe that make us embrace one faith. What are those? Well, let me phrase the question a little differently. What does a true church hold to, that a false church does not? Or what is the great difference between a weak, disobedient, doctrinally corrupt, true church and a false church? It’s simply this: when they deny the truth of the Gospel, when they deny the truth of the gospel, when they cross the line in their teaching about the person and work of Jesus Christ. John, the apostle, makes this point time and again, in his first letter. First John 2:22, “Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Messiah? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.” Chapter 4:2,

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist.

Verse 15 of the same chapter, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” Chapter 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Messiah is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.” Go to 2 John, his second letter, verse 7: “Many deceivers have gone out in the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.” Verse 9, “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching about Christ does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.” You get John’s point? If you embrace the faith, it means you embrace the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ. And you cross that line, and it’s no longer “the faith.”

The same thing is true, not only about the person and work of Christ, but also about the message of salvation. In Galatians 1 Paul says that there were, there were people in Galatia, in the churches in Galatia, calling themselves Christians, who were not. And, in fact, in Galatians 1:6 he says, “Some of you are deserting Christ for a different gospel” (a perverted, distorted gospel). And he says, “If anyone comes to you and preaches another gospel (verse 8), contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed (anathema, damned!). He is to be consigned to eternal damnation!”

What is Paul saying? He’s saying that if someone adds to the true gospel (as the Judaizers did), If they add to “justification by faith alone”, then they have crossed the line. They are no longer Christian. They are no longer part of the true church. They are the false church. In fact, in 2:4, he calls them, “false brethren”. They pretend to be the real thing, but they’re not. The Judaizers claimed to be an expression of genuine Christianity. But Paul absolutely disagreed. He said their denial of “justification by faith alone” made them the enemies of the Gospel.

Now what does what does all this mean? Listen carefully. It means that there is, and can be no unity with those who deny the truth about the person and work of Jesus Christ, OR, who add to faith alone, as the sole way to be made right with God (even if they call themselves “brothers,” and even if they say they love Jesus Christ). We are united in the faith. And when you cross those lines, (on the person and work of Christ, or how a person comes to faith in Christ), you have crossed out of orthodoxy, into heresy and heterodoxy. But where there is the true Gospel, where there is the faith, the person and work of Christ, and the means of salvation, we are united together in the faith, in one faith. We have embraced one Gospel.

The sixth reality that serves as a basis for our unity is: we share a common confession. We share a common confession. Verse 5 says, “one baptism.” one baptism. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. Now some people think that this is a reference to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit here. But that’s not the best interpretation, because that’s already been implied, back in 4:4, “one body.” We’ve been baptized into one body by the Spirit. I have to agree with most commentators, here, and say that the baptism mentioned here is probably water baptism.

Now, again, at first, it may seem to, odd to think of that as a source of unity; because, again, this is one of those controversial issues among even Christian people. How do you baptize people? How much water should you use? How should you apply it? The point Paul is making here, isn't about the mode of baptism. It's about the meaning of baptism. You see, in New Testament times, baptism was accompanied by a public confession of Jesus Christ. Christians were baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That expression is used time and again.

In fact, there's one I want you to turn to. Look at Acts 19. Acts 19 actually happened in Ephesus. Paul gets to Ephesus on his missionary journey. And when he gets there, he discovers some of John the Baptist's disciples, who don't yet know about Jesus. All they know is: John said, "The Messiah's coming." They don't know He's come. And so, Paul explains to them. Verse 4, "Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him. And He's here! It's Jesus!" Verse 5, "When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Kurios: Jesus." It was a public confession that "He is the One whom I'm following. He is, again, the "Kurios", and I'm the slave. I'm the disciple. I'm learning from Him. I am swearing my allegiance to Him. I'm confessing Him."

William Barklay makes the point that, in the first century, there was only one way for a man to join the Roman army. And that was, he had to publicly renounce every other allegiance, and take an oath of allegiance to the emperor as his "kurios". Barklay goes on to say, in the same way, there was only one way to enter the Christian church: the way of public confession of Jesus Christ, in baptism.

Baptism was, and is, a confession, a public confession to Jesus Christ; that He has become my Savior, my Master, my Teacher. And all of us are united, because we have made that public confession. He is that to us.

Finally, the seventh foundation, or basis of our unity: It's found in verse 6, we share a common God and Father. We share a common God and Father. Verse 6 says, "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all, and in all." Now this is not primarily a reference to monotheism,

the idea that there's only one God, although that's certainly true. This is a reference to the fact that, through the work of Christ, we all have come to know the same God; and that same God is our Father. When Paul says, here, "Father of all," he doesn't mean all people, without exception; but rather, of all Christians. This is what he said back in chapter 2, Ephesians 2:18. You remember, we, we've met this phrase already: "For through Christ, we both (that is, Jews and Gentiles) have our access in one Spirit to the Father." He only becomes our Father when we gain access to Him through Christ. And so, here, he's saying, "That's true of all Christians." We have the same Father, because we've come to Him through Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 8:6, that I read a few moments ago, it says, "For us, there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things, and we exist for Him." You know, all of us are very different in so many different ways. And yet, we are united, because we share the same Father. Isn't it the same way in our human families? Many of you will be, over the Christmas holidays, getting together with family. And as you contemplate that, you realize how different people can be, and still be a part of the same family.

If you've been a part of our church any time at all, you know that I come from a large family. I'm the last of ten kids. I have four brothers, and five sisters. Some of my brothers and I are very much alike. We look alike. We think alike. We behave alike. It's unbelievable. Other brothers and I hardly seem to be related, except for we share the same profile. What holds us together? We have the same Father! We're brothers! And that's exactly what's true in the spiritual world, as well. That's how it is with us, as Christians. We all belong to each other, because we all belong to the same Father! That's the point of unity!

Notice how Paul describes our Father, the end of verse 6: "who is over all, and in and through all, and in all." God is over all: that is, He exercises Sovereign control over all Christians. God is through all: that is, through His Sovereign Providence, He sustains all Christians. He is in all: that is, His Sovereign Presence is with all Christians. Folks, the fact that we all embrace one being as God and Father is the basis for our unity.

So, those seven realities, those seven foundation stones, those seven pillars, or as they're sometimes called, those seven unities, unite us to every other true Christian. And Paul has listed them, here, as a reminder of the basis of our unity, (and folks) as a motivation to preserve the unity. But did you notice something that's hidden in these verses? Ultimately, those things are not the source of our unity. Our unity grows out of the nature of God? Did you see it? Verse 4, "One Spirit;" Verse 5, "One Lord;" Verse 6, "One Father." You see, the ultimate basis of our unity rests in the Unity that God, Himself, enjoys. We worship one God, who eternally exists in three distinct Persons. Now think about that, in relationship to us. Although each of us are distinct people, we eternally exist in a unity that Paul compares to the Unity that the Persons of the Trinity enjoy. That is the true basis of Christian unity.

Even as God is united in the trinity of His Person, you and I are to be united. We are to be a reflection of that unity. As John Stott says, "Can God be divided? Then neither can we!" He says, "Is there only One God? Then He has only one church. Is the unity of God violable? Then so is the unity of the church. It is no more possible to split the church than it is possible to split the Godhead."

You see why this issue of unity is so important to God? Because it reflects who He is in His very nature! And do you see what damage it does to the character of our God, for us to allow disunity and division. In fact, do you see it as that important? Let me put the question a different way. Do you understand how deadly serious it is to disrupt the unity of the church, unless it is for the cause that Scripture has given us, which is: if there is a breach of one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian Faith, or, there is a pattern of unrepentant sin that needs to be confronted from Matthew 18? If it's not one of those two things, do you understand how serious this is to God? It's a devastating blow to His character, because He is, by nature, united. And He's called us to be united in the same way.

Let me show you how serious He is about it. Turn to one of the most sobering passages in all the New Testament: First Corinthians 3, and with this passage, we close our time together this morning. But I want you to see this: 1 Corinthians 3, Paul has been dealing with divisiveness and division in the church in Corinth. And he's called them "fleshly" for how they are allowing

this division and divisiveness to go on. And he warns them in several different ways. And then he comes to the end of this section. And he, he utters these very sobering words, verse 16 of 1 Corinthians 3, “Do you not know that you” (stop there) The word “you” in the Greek text is plural. He’s talking now, to the church, as a whole. This letter was being read. And he says, “Do you not know that you (all of you; you all in the church) Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” The church in Corinth was like a temple in which God lived! Folks, this church (Countryside Bible Church) is like a temple, in which the Spirit of God lives! Verse 17, “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy Him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

Wow! You see God says, through Paul? Paul’s point is that if you and I are careless with the church, (that is, the people who make up the church); if we harm the unity of the church; if we harm the temple of God, God will take that very seriously. And He will deal with us, in kind. You harm God’s temple; He’ll harm you. You mess with God; He’ll mess with you. That’s what it says! Perhaps, nowhere in the New Testament does God make it more clear how important the church is to Him. Damaging the church comes with a serious penalty. In the Old Testament if you damaged the physical temple, standing in Jerusalem, the penalty was death. God is just as jealous of His spiritual temple, the church, as He was of the physical one. You better think twice, before you become (or I better think twice before I become) the source of disunity and division in the church; because God says: “If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him.”

Instead, we ought to preserve it. How do we preserve the unity that God has created? We put on the attitudes of unity, and we focus on the basis of our unity, these seven great pillars. Folks, there’s a lot that could divide us. But we can choose to focus on these things that unite us, these things we share in common.

Let’s pray together.

Our Father, these are sobering words. And I pray that You would drive these truths deep within our hearts. Father, may we embrace the things that we share in common, the things that unite us.

Lord, may we remind ourselves of them often, when we are tempted to look at the differences and to focus on the differences. Father, may we remind ourselves, again, of what draws us together, of what we share in common. And Father, I pray, that You would preserve the unity of this church. Lord, I ask, that you would help each of us to take the sober warning Paul gave us in I Corinthians 3, to heart, and would realize that this is Your temple. The people who make up this church are like a temple to You, in which You dwell. And we'd better be very careful about damaging it. Father, protect this church.

Thank You for the unity we already enjoy. And I pray that you would help us to preserve it, by putting on the attitudes that promote unity: attitudes of humility and gentleness, and patience, and quickness to overlook the faults and flaws of others. And Father, may we focus on those great realities that draw us together in Christ.

We pray this in Jesus' Name and for the good and health of His church. Amen.