

The Unity of the Spirit

by Tim Conway

This sermon emphasizes the importance of maintaining unity in the church, urging believers to walk in humility, gentleness, patience, and love to preserve the unity of the Spirit. The speaker highlights the need to conspire with the Holy Spirit, be eager to maintain unity, and actively guard against selfishness and disunity. The message stresses the significance of unity in fulfilling the Great Commission and the potential consequences of disunity within the church.

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Scripture: Ephesians 4:1, Romans 12:16, Acts 4:32, Philippians 2:2, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Romans 15:5, Acts 5:12, Acts 15:25, Isaiah 52:8

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Description

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Transcript

Please open your Bibles to Ephesians 4. Ephesians 4, verse 1, I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Father, I pray for Your help just now. Father, we need fresh grace and we pray that great grace, just as it was in the early church, may fall upon us.

Lord, grace, the way we understand grace from Scripture is that grace was given to the Apostle Paul and he abundantly outran all the other apostles. Grace is powerful. Grace unleashed is giving us definitely what we don't deserve, but it manifests itself in a power to live, a power that's demonstrated.

And I pray that that would be the case in this place today. Unleash through Your Word a power and energy and efficacy to transform, to shake us, to lift us up, to bring us further, to help us run faster. Lord, by Your grace, I pray that the preached Word would accomplish that very thing for which You've given it to the church.

I ask it in Christ's name, Amen. Notice with me v. 3. The ESV says, eager. That's not a bad translation.

The new King James, the old King James, endeavoring. It's the new American standard. Being diligent.

Eager. Endeavor. Diligent.

This word actually has various shades of meaning. I'm going to talk about that a little bit in a second. If you're going to be diligent at something, if you're going to be eager, eager, diligent, endeavoring, even those words have little different nuances of meaning.

Maybe not even so small a nuance, but there's some differences even in what those words mean. But think about it. Eager.

You know what it means to really be diligent to do something. If you're watching somebody work and you say, wow, he's being really diligent. Or he hit that project with eagerness.

Look at him go. I mean, that means something to us. What are we to be eager about? How are we to be eager about something? Eager in my estimation has to do with you're stirred up about this.

How does that happen? How do you get stirred up about anything? Nothing. We're told here to be eager about maintaining the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. Think about the things in your life that you get eager about, that you get really stirred up about.

How do you get eager about something? Well, for starters, you think about it. You dwell on it. Things that we really get excited about.

Things that really stir us up. They're things we think about. They're things that we find desirable.

They're things we find precious. They're things that we want to go after. How will we be eager about anything unless we find it highly desirable? How do we get to the place? If you think about how you get to the place where you get eager about anything, but how do you get to the place where you get eager about maintaining the unity of the Spirit in this church among God's people? We have to consider it.

We have to consider what the unity of the Spirit is. We have to find it desirable. We have to give it some sort of definition.

I mean, unity of the Spirit. What does that even mean? Let alone, are you desirable about it? You're hardly going to have a great desire and eagerness to maintain this thing and to be diligent about it and endeavor to do it unless it's something that you... For one thing, I would say as Christians, you've got to come to the place where it's... You know, as Christians, we tend to look at something that God finds precious or God finds highly desirable. That tends to lend credibility to us that we ought to be finding it desirable.

Paul has been trying to tell us something about this unity as he's moved along. Look at chapter 1, verse 9-10 actually. The mystery.

Jump right into verse 9. The mystery of God's will. The mystery. This mystery.

That's an interesting concept that you find throughout the Ephesian epistle. Mystery. What is the mystery? Well, in one place we find the mystery is this.

It's the Gentiles are fellow heirs. What does that mean? The Gentiles have been brought into the family. There's a unity now.

And if you notice what's said here, the mystery of God's will according to His purpose. You want to know about God's purposes, about God's eternal plan? He sets this purpose forth in Christ. It's a plan for the fullness of time to unite all things.

There it is. To unite all things. He's not talking about rocks and trees and clouds.

He's talking about people that are either in heaven already because they've been saved and died. He calls them things, yes. If you cross-reference this with a similar passage in Colossians, you see that all these things in heaven and on earth that are being united together are being united together through the cross of Christ.

This is all about Christ redeeming people and bringing them together. And largely what you have in heaven are the Jews who have been the people of God and have now died. Largely what you have on earth at the time when this was being written are the Gentiles.

When you get to Ephesians 2.15, turn right there. That He might create in Himself one new man. One.

There's the idea of unity. One new man in place of the two, so making peace. And of course, that's between Jew and Gentile.

But that peace is made between all of us that fall at the foot of the cross. This is the unity. This is the plan.

In these first three chapters, that's the kind of thing that you've been seeing. The mystery is that the Gentiles are brought in. You're no longer strangers.

You're no longer aliens. You're now fellow citizens with the saints. You've been brought in.

There's this unity in the family of God, in the kingdom of God. Eager. That's the word.

Eager. The word means to hurry to do something. You know, from the Proverbs, we tend to think being hasty about things leads to wrong decisions.

If you're too quick. But you know what? This word has that idea. Make haste.

You don't have to think about this one. You go. You do this.

Make haste. Be eager. Do this quickly.

We're to show great concern. We're to be diligent, ambitious, enthusiastic. Never forget, this is to be on your minds.

This is a chief matter. Let this be one of the chief things in your life. This unity that exists among the people of God.

The word conveys the idea of an intense effort. Listen, this is not about just coming among God's people and oh yeah, well that's a nice concept. That's something I ought to probably think about once in a while.

Behind this word eager is intensity. It means that you're zealous. There's a concentration.

There's a diligent effort to do this. It also suggests that there's difficulty. And it is with a pronounced effort that you overcome the difficulty.

Maintaining unity is difficult. It is not set forth as being an easy thing. It suggests that this is something precious, this unity of the Spirit, and it takes considerable effort to keep this thing going, to keep it alive.

It's the idea of a maximum effort to do your best, spare no effort, hurry on, be eager. It's in the present tense. When you get that kind of tense, it means you keep on going.

This isn't a one-time thing. This isn't while you try. This isn't while I join the church and now I'm one of them.

I've become a member. But you don't come. You're at odds with people.

You're divisive. You stay at a distance. You don't participate in the church's ministries.

You just don't really care about the other people in the church. It isn't while I became a member back in that day. No, this is you're being a member of the body every day.

You're being a part of the whole. You're playing a part. You keep on making the effort.

You don't stop striving to guard the oneness of the body of believers. Why is this so difficult? It's so difficult for the very reason that Craig brought up in the first hour. You see, Craig, he was talking about life in the family.

I'm talking about life in the church. And the same thing that divides in the family divides in the church. Same thing.

Why is it so difficult? I urge you, that's what comes at us. I urge you to walk in a manner worthy. And you need to think about this, brethren.

Out of all the things coming out of the rich doctrine of the first three chapters, when he urges us to walk worthy, the very first thing he hits upon from 4.2 down to 4.16 is unity. It's like Paul is saying, you want to know the chief thing about walking worthy as a Christian? It's not that you put the Jesus sticker at your desk at work. Or you wear the t-shirt.

You know what he's saying? He's saying, okay, we've got these people. I've hoped to bring them up into glory over the realities of their salvation. Now, where the rubber meets the road, you want to be practical, you guys need to walk worthy.

And the first thing I've got for you when it comes to this worthy walk is this. Maintain the unity of the Spirit. First thing.

Verses 2-16 is largely taken up with this subject. This is of first importance. Why? Why the effort? Because most of the troubles arise from selfishness.

And look, we are people who are redeemed. We've been born again. We've been regenerated.

A lot of times there's this argument, well, are we the old nature or are we the new nature? The reality is this. We're new creations in Christ. But, we're not at home with the Lord yet.

We still live in the flesh. And what does Scripture say? Make no provision for the flesh. Why? Because the flesh is the unredeemable part of us.

It's the part that's going to die. And then Jesus is going to make that part altogether new. New bodies.

This is the kernel. This is like the grain that falls in. But there's something about the meat, the flesh that we're still in.

There's fleshly desires. Yes, it's native to what we were naturally. And there's a pull.

You know, the flesh, you live in it every day. And the new self, the redeemed self, what did Jesus say? When they were falling asleep in the garden, what did He say? Something about the flesh and the Spirit. Anybody remember? Spirit is willing.

But what? See, and here's the thing. It's like we're walking through a river that's flowing in the opposite direction. However, there could be many illustrations, but basically what it tells us is there's this force.

There is this reality. However you want to define it, you know that this is a reality. And we feel it.

There's a pull that we have to fight against to make strides to go in the right direction. Why do we have to be so eager about maintaining unity? I'll tell you why. Because there's this pull on every one of us to be selfish.

Every one of us. No matter how redeemed you are and how long you've walked with the Lord, there's that pull. There's that temptation.

There's that reality with the flesh. Sin does something. It puts self at center.

Sin makes me feel like I alone am important. What I think is what really matters. What I feel is what matters.

What's happening to me is what matters. And so you walk into the church. Oh, I want everybody to ask me how I'm doing and what's going on in my life.

And the guy that walks up to you, and it's like, well, let me tell you all about my sicknesses and my problems. Something happens. There's a chemistry when we interact with other people.

I mean, something is happening about what we think about ourselves and what they think about themselves. You know that. You know that's a reality.

And most of us weren't saved maybe like John the Baptist in the womb. We had years where we walked. So we know what it's like to walk as lost people through this world and we got redeemed and we know how that thing changed.

But even it changed, we know that there's this dynamic in how we interact with others. And you know this, if you're going to be eager and you're going to be diligent, you're going to cut through this. You've got to cut through the selfishness.

That's where the battle lies that I am not most important. We need to remember. We need to think.

We need to be constantly given to this. We must not forget. And we can get forgetful.

We walk in here. We don't feel good. One of the sisters had a migraine this morning.

I can enter into that. We come in here. Some people come to church.

They just do what they can get. And when they can't stop getting, they just go to another church. That is exactly the attitude that they're not being earnest about and eager about.

This unity of the Spirit. The natural disposition is one of the things I see oftentimes in brand new Christians. They come to the prayer meeting and all their prayers are about themselves.

It shouldn't be that way. You see, basically, we are to be devoted to the loving of each other and the serving of each other. We need to think about the things that bring disunity into the body.

And we need to fight against them. We need to resist them. And one of the primary things is when you're stuck on yourself and you come in here and you want to be great and you want to stand taller than everybody else and you remember what it was with the Pharisees.

They wanted the chief seats. And there's lots of ways you can want the chief seat. You want the attention.

Woe is me. Self-pity. The natural disposition is to spend too much time thinking about ourselves and not enough time thinking about others occupied with our personal interests.

If you remember, look, get past the carnal Christian heresy. There is a carnal Christian. And all you have to do is look at 1 Corinthians to find carnal Christians.

What marked their carnality? Disunity. And you see it manifested several ways. One, I've got my favorite preacher over here and you have another favorite preacher and so we're at odds with each other.

Also, they were suing each other. Well, you've got some pretty good disunity when you get to the place where Christians are suing each other. What else? Well, you know what? You had people in the church that were thinking my spiritual gift is better than their spiritual gift and I'm an eyeball and I don't need that toe.

And then you've got the problem with the Lord's Supper. In 1 Corinthians 11, the rich weren't waiting for the poor and that divided them. Sin is disruptive.

It's a disruptive force. It divides. It separates.

It splinters. That's what it does. It leads to enmity, war, strife.

You can read that there in James. The world is shattered by sin. But you know the shameful thing about it is and the reality is how many churches are riddled by disunity? And you can be certain of this.

We've got an enemy that just delights in dividing Christians. Delights in it. And he's there to fuel any fire if we give him place to do that.

So what's the solution? The only way we can eagerly maintain the unity of the Spirit is this. It's daily renouncing of selfishness. But what did Jesus call us to do daily? What did He call us? He called us to carry our cross.

He called us to die. That's what happens when you carry the cross. It's an instrument of death.

He called us to die. Do we really understand the basic principle in our church? That the natural tendency... You have to recognize this. There's a pull.

And if we don't fight, if we just ignore it, if we're just indifferent, if we just take a neutral attitude, we have to recognize that if we just leave unity alone, the natural tendency is towards disunity. The natural tendency is towards selfishness if we're not proactive. And, by the way, this word eager is in the active voice.

Active voice indicates that it's an action of striving earnestly. It's a volitional choice. You know what I mean by that? We have to be determined.

We have to make an intense effort. And I just ask this, is this even on your radar? I mean, when you're acting as part of this church, is this even something you're thinking about? I mean, is it more, well, I'm going to church. I hope to get something out of the preaching.

I want to talk to Brother So-and-So because I haven't seen him in a while. There was something we were talking about before and I want to follow up with that. What's your approach walking in here? What Paul would have you do is recognize when you're coming together with the brethren, even as you live your life throughout the week, you are to be mindful.

You're not to forget this. You're to be earnest about this. How can I bring it together? What is unity? Unity is that oneness.

It is that binding. It is that bringing together. It's the opposite of splintering and schism and being at odds with other people.

It's the idea that there's union and harmony, one accord, one thought, one mind. We're striving together for the same things. We're moving together in the same way.

There's a love that permeates us and we move along. We're serving one another. Are you eager for this? Are you thinking about what the Apostle says? Do you think, I'm eager.

How can I do this? You have to be thinking. You have to be thinking about the things that divide. You think about the things that are healing, the things that are nurturing.

And the Bible is full of this. You think your brother has something against you. You leave your gift at the altar.

See, that's a healing. Jesus was interested in healing when He came to say, I didn't come to serve, or I didn't come to be served, but rather to serve and give my life a ransom for many. I mean, that kind of mindset is a healing.

It's a unifying. It's not a selfish one. Selfishness, pride, it's where we think we're different from everybody else.

We think we're better. We're not coming along to serve. It's of first importance with Paul.

Therefore, he comes off these magnificent and lofty doctrines and he says, therefore, and for one, walk worthy. This is the first characteristic of a worthy walk. You don't want to blow past this.

And I would just ask you this, is this of first importance with you in your Christian walk? That's the question. Now look at the next word. Maintain.

Eager to maintain. KJV says endeavoring to keep the New American Standard, being diligent to preserve. I want you to think about those three words.

Maintain is ESV. Keep is the King James family. And preserve is the New American Standard.

Just think about that. Maintain, keep, preserve. All good words.

But listen to each one. What does each one imply? If you're to maintain something, what does that mean? Look, if somebody says, I want you to watch my house while I'm gone. I want you to maintain it.

Does that mean I want you to build my house? Or we talk about keep. I want to keep these documents safe over in my filing cabinet over here. Keep.

You know what? That implies that the documents already exist. Maintaining the house. If you want to preserve wood, my wife is doing something on our table right now.

If I say, you know, Ruby, you need to put that sealer on there to preserve that wood. That doesn't mean she needs to create the wood or create the table. It means that the table already exists.

Paul is being very specific here. He is saying the unity that he's concerned with is already there. You see, what does he call it? He calls it the unity of the Spirit.

What he is implying here is that the Spirit has created this. Paul calls it the unity of the Spirit. It's His.

It's His work. He alone can produce this unity. You and I cannot produce it.

He alone can produce it. He alone does produce it. You and I don't.

And Paul doesn't ask us to do that. He doesn't exhort us to create it. He doesn't in any way give us instruction or a mandate or a commandment.

He only presses us to be careful to maintain the unity that's already there. He's assuming it exists where you have Christians. We're to maintain it.

Now, this likewise. Present tense. Paul is calling for these saints at Ephesus and for us to continually maintain.

That means to guard it. Keep it. Protect it.

Watch over it. Why would we need to guard the unity? Well, the answer's simple. You want to guard things? You know, I don't really guard the dirt in my front yard.

I don't gather it all up and put it in the backyard so it's behind the fence. I don't really guard the acorns that are falling on the ground out there. I don't guard the sidewalk.

I don't guard the grass. But I don't leave my laptop out on the front sidewalk. You see, the thing is, we guard what's valuable.

We guard what's precious. In the sight of God, this is really precious. We think unity is like, well, what's that? Why do we have to hear preaching on that? It's precious to the Lord.

That's one of the reasons we need to guard it. Second thing, it can be stolen by enemies. And if you read your New Testament at all, you recognize there are these people, many, who on the day of judgment are not going to be real, but they were in the church.

There are those that went out from us. They're called antichrists. If they're against Christ, they're against us if we love Christ.

But they come into the church and then they go out from the church. We read in the Scriptures about false apostles, false Christ, false teachers, false prophets, false brethren. People creep into the church.

We have exactly that terminology. They creep in. Have you ever read this? Paul talking to the Ephesian elders.

These are the leaders. He says wolves are going to come in. They're going to mess his flock up.

And you know what? Some of these wolves are some of you guys. Don't count it a strange thing that the devil is specifically aiming at destroying the unity here. You can guarantee that.

I guarantee that is an objective that some evil spirits are undertaking to make happen. You can count on that. And you know what's interesting? I find it interesting that in Romans 16, verse 17, when it comes to people that cause disunity in the church, bang! Paul says avoid them.

Just like that. He doesn't even say, well, go to them once and then take two or three and then do this and go through all this process. No process.

He just basically says, I appeal to you. Watch out for those who cause division. Create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you've been taught.

Avoid them. Bang! Here's another reason we need to guard it. Because even if those bad folks, and listen, they don't look bad.

They don't look like the devil when they walk in. They don't have the Halloween costume on. They actually look like friendly people.

And sometimes it's hard for us to actually take the realities of Scripture and apply it because it's like, well, we know them. We love them. We like them.

We hung out with them. They can be hard then. They don't come in here looking all devilish and monster-like.

In fact, usually they look like angels of light. But here's the other thing. That even if those folks don't come in here, the very nature of the Spirit's unity is that it's given, obviously, we get this feel, it's given to entropy.

Anybody know what that is? That's a nice term from my engineering days. Physics. Thermodynamics.

The second law of thermodynamics is the law of entropy. You know what that means? That means that basically energy is breaking down into more and more of an unusable and disordered form. It means

things are breaking down.

It's basically the curse that you see in Romans 8. Things are degenerating. And unity is susceptible to entropy. The Spirit's gift of unity to the church has this natural tendency among the body of Christ, if it's left unguarded, it manifests a natural tendency to dissipate, to go away, to be destroyed.

And here's another thought for you as to why we should guard it. It struck me that once lost, it is very likely impossible to restore. You say, what do you mean? Have you ever considered what the average life of a church is? Just think, we were down in Nicaragua and we got on the subject of the Lord's Supper and not discerning the body.

If you look at the context there, what Paul has in mind, that's where the rich weren't waiting for the poor when they took the Lord's Supper. You know what Paul said? Paul said, when you come together, it's not the Lord's Supper that you eat. Why would he say that? It's not the Lord's Supper that you eat.

Because they thought it was. You see, they were gathering together to take the Lord's Supper. But you know what he says? It's not.

You think it is, but it's not. Why? Because they were at odds with each other. Because they weren't properly discerning the body.

Do you know that the unworthy state in which people die when they take the Lord's Supper isn't just whether you've sinned during the week before you take the Lord's Supper. It's being aggressively disunifying in the church. It's looking down.

It's despising others within the body. That's the context there. You read it.

And I've been thinking, what happens when a church loses its unity? For one, God kills people. Two, the Lord's Supper is no longer the Lord's Supper. Churches come and go.

Have you ever asked yourself, what happened to the church in Jerusalem? The church in Antioch? The church in Ephesus? The church in Philippi? The church in Thessalonica? The church in Corinth? The church in Rome? Where did they go? Have you considered how the Lord threatens to remove candlesticks? You ever read that? He threatens to remove them. What does that mean? It means the light's gone. Churches begin to unravel when the unity's lost.

When unity dissipates, God was putting the Corinthians to death. That's exactly what Paul says. Some of you are sleeping because of that reality.

And when you take the Lord's Supper, it's no longer the Lord's Supper. You're just going through the motions. But in the Lord's sight, it's no longer what you think it is.

When unity dissipates, God may not end just the life of individuals. He ends the life of the church and the candlesticks removing. Do you know churches get to the place when the Lord's Supper is not the Lord's Supper? Do you know churches get to the place? I mean, Craig was hitting on it.

You have a fracture in the family. Your prayers are no longer prayers. You're going through the motions, but they're not getting anywhere because there's disunity.

A church gets to the place where preaching is no longer preaching, fellowship's no longer fellowship, baptism's no longer baptism, singing is no longer singing. And you know what? The church building may be there and there may be people going in and out of the doors every Sunday, but that promise of the Lord where two or three gather together, that candlestick's gone. And listen, if you think I'm venturing out on a limb here, you just think about this.

What is it that we need to do to guard the unity of the Spirit? Now, there may be many ways, but I would have your attention drawn specifically to Ephesians 4. What does it say? This is key. With all humility, or we could say lowliness, and gentleness. That's the word for meekness.

Patience. Bearing with one another in love. Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

Do you know what's very interesting about those characteristics? Paul is basically repeating the Beatitudes that our Lord Jesus Christ gives at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Just listen to this. You don't need to turn there.

But listen, blessed are the poor in spirit. There's our lowliness, our humility. Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek. That's our gentleness. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

He goes on to say blessed are the peacemakers. There's the bond of peace. Do you know what our Lord says after He lists those Beatitudes? He says you are the salt of the earth.

But if you lose your saltiness, how will you be re-salted? And you know what? He doesn't say with God all things are possible. They are. But you know what He says? He says if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It's a rhetorical question.

He expects us to come to the answer it can't be. Because He goes on to say it's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. Here's the thing, when those things dissipate and the saltiness is gone, those are the things behind unity.

When that unity dissipates, the Lord's Supper is no longer the Lord's Supper. Our worship is no longer worship. Will this church survive 100 years? We might hope so.

But you know what? Most churches don't. Watch churches. I mean, somewhere along the line, it seems like they get cast out on being trampled underfoot, being good for nothing else.

You know what happens? Decline. Decline sets in. The Lord removes the candlestick.

The four walls of the building, yeah, they may be there. It's all form. The substance is gone.

And if you don't think so, all you have to do is look around. All you have to do is look at church history. And all you have to do is watch churches.

Do you know it is a massive mercy of God that this church has not suffered any major split? It's the mercy of God. But I'll tell you this, it being a mercy of God does not mean that we should take any other posture than what Paul's calling for, to fight for it. Because I'll tell you this, the Spirit of God works through your fight.

And you don't fight this battle with sword. You fight this battle with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another. Bearing! We're not thin-skinned.

Thin-skinned Christians ruin and wreck churches. You're people who are tolerant. You're people who have thick skins.

You're not easily offended. You're not squealing and running around all the time. You're not wagging your tongues all the time.

What is the Holy Spirit doing in this church? Think about it. The Holy Spirit is God. He's a Person.

He's the third Person of the Holy Trinity. And we're taught this. We're taught that if we belong to Christ, then the Spirit is within us.

You know what it says there in Romans 8 and 9? It says that if we don't have the Spirit, we don't belong to Christ. And the reality is this, wherever the Spirit is, wherever He dwells, He leaves His marks. And you know what? Here's what's true.

If you have the Holy Spirit and I don't have the Holy Spirit, we can't have this unity. It can't exist there. If I have the Holy Spirit and you don't have the Holy Spirit, it doesn't work.

But where both of us possess this Spirit... I'm talking about Christianity that is not just simply doing good, being moral, being religious. The religionists, they can't even enter in here. But I'll tell you, there is something that resonates when two Christians come eyeball to eyeball.

There's some reality. People that are just religious, you start talking about things like this, they're like a deer caught in the headlights. They don't know.

They can't go there. If He's not in me, I can have no spiritual fellowship with a man in whom He does dwell. And when you find two people that come face to face that both possess the Spirit of God, you become conscious of some bond of unity.

I've felt this in faraway countries. You come face to face. Maybe there's a language barrier, but you recognize, no matter how your age may differ, no matter how far away you were separated in this world, you come together and it's like the same God has rescued this person with the same salvation, though they be a separate soul.

And there is a commonness there. There's a true fellowship that we feel. What is it? I mean, look, it involves the mind, our desires, the things we love.

It certainly involves Christ. It involves the direction of our life. It involves what we believe.

It involves our hopes, our purpose for living. But even though we may not be able to exactly define all of it, when it's present, we know it. We feel it.

When we get around certain people, we don't feel it. I mean, you ever been around somebody professing Christian and you get around them? Certain people give us the feeling that something's wrong. This is a reality.

And it's likely going to prove true. You're going to get there to judgment day and that person that they claim to be a Christian, they wore a big smile, they taught Christ, they carried that thing under there, but you always felt something's strange, something just isn't right, something doesn't resonate. And I don't think it's going to be any surprise on judgment day you're going to see they weren't real.

You know, this kind of unity, it was the reality of the early church. You go through the book of Acts and you find this one accord, one mind. Think Acts 1.14. All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer.

That's 2.46 day by day attending the temple together is what the ESD says. It means with one purpose. The new King James.

One accord. The old King James. One accord.

New American Standard. One mind. That's how they were coming together and breaking bread in their homes.

In Acts 4.32, Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul. And no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. Here's the thing, if we're true believers, we share a fundamental unity at the deepest level, at the core of our beings.

This inner reality, oneness of hope, oneness of confidence, it produces this unity of soul. Here's the thing you've got to think about. Acts 4. One mind.

One soul. Yeah, but just tick the clock back a little bit. 3,000 people.

Where were they from? Remember what season this was. This was Passover. People were from all over the place, from all sorts of different nations.

These 3,000 people, Peter preaches to them and they're converted. These people were from different countries. These people were from radically different countries, different skin colors.

But now look at them. One mind. Oneness.

Unity. And I'm not talking Christian clones. Not that.

In fact, when you get people in the church who insist, we've got to all think about things exactly the right way in homeschool our children exactly the right way, and we've got to think just like they think and like the same music that they like. People like that destroy unity. They don't help unity in the church.

That's a disunifying mindset that can infect the church. It's legalism. But the Spirit within these people, it produced a harmony.

What does that look like? You see in Philippians 3, there's this one Spirit. He produces a like-minded worship. He produces a like-minded glorying in Christ.

He produces a like-minded not putting confidence in the flesh. It doesn't mean we're all thinking exactly the same thing and think the same thing about every conceivable thing. That's not it.

In Acts 5.12, they were all together or all in one accord in Solomon's portico. You get to Acts 15.25. It has seemed good to us having come to one accord to choose men and send them to you with our beloved

Barnabas and Paul. They're sending men.

One accord. It was an expression of these early believers that great unity. I mean, you think about the unity and they're launching men forth.

Think about the unity behind the church with they fasted and that church with unified sense thrust Paul and Barnabas out into the pagan darkness around. God help us when we get to be a church where people are resisting the Great Commission, where we stand in the way of it, where we're unwilling to give up people and give up our money, where we fight against that. Brethren, we don't want to be divided behind the missionary endeavor and God forbid that that ever happen.

You look at the Moravians. You know what was true about the Moravians prior to 1727? If you're not familiar with the Moravians, they are a group of people that came out of present-day Czechoslovakia and they came into the southeast region of present-day Germany. And Count Zinzendorf allowed them to come on his property and set up a community.

And they came there. There was fighting and disunity. They were at each other's throats.

It was ugly. And they were made up of scattered people from different places and they were finding refuge. But I'll tell you what happened.

1727, the Spirit of God fell. Once the Spirit of God fell, there was a unity. A supernatural unity was ignited.

It was just such Christ-followers as those who will sail the oceans, trek the mountains, cross the deserts with the Word. And they were unified in it. And they turned the world upside down.

Mark it, brethren. When there's great unity in the church, that is when the church is likely to be greatly used by God. I have a book on my shelf.

I count it one of the best books in my library. It's by Ichabod Spencer. I want to tell you about Spencer.

We don't know his name very well. He was actually called the Bunyan of Brooklyn. Brooklyn, New York.

One of the greatest preachers our country has had. In fact, there was a time when his material, his book was one of the greatest selling Christian pieces of literature in our country. But he's become largely unknown today.

He was a pastor of a congregational church during the early 1800's. Here's the thing about him. I'm bringing him up for a reason.

It's got to do with this unity. There was a young man that saw him. There was a meeting.

This guy did exceptionally well, especially with people that were under conviction. This young man was converted through Spencer's ministry. And he noticed in the meeting that he was in that God used in a pronounced fashion, there were 70 of them.

Spencer went through all 70 and he just spoke a few words. He asked them a question or two and then he spoke just a simple few words to each one of them. This one young man, the words that Spencer spoke to him stuck in his conscience and he was converted through it.

And he went back to Spencer and he said, when you have so little time with so many people, how do you know what to say to each one of the individuals? And he said this. It's always stuck with me. I seek to conspire with the Holy Spirit.

Now today, conspire to us has kind of a negative connotation. But the meaning is basically this. Working together to achieve the same end.

I bring that up because I know this. The Spirit of God is at work to produce unity in this church. And if you want to conspire with the Holy Spirit, then jump on board.

There are some of you, you know, the Spirit has been working and you're convicted right now that something is not right between you and someone else in the church. You know it. You're agitated.

Your feelings are hurt because you haven't been given an opportunity to do what you think your gifts demand in this church. You feel like you've been slighted. You feel like you've been overlooked.

And I would say this, that in selflessness, not counting yourself beyond what you should, but rather esteeming other people's needs greater than your own, approach things with that mindset. If there's some problem between you and somebody else that you need to resolve, see, these are the things that are conspiring with the Spirit. You want to conspire with the Spirit? Push in the same way He's pushing.

Don't be off even a few degrees. For every degree you're off pushing in the same direction the Spirit pushes is wasted energy. If you want to know what the Spirit of God is doing in this work, there may be many things, many different ways He's working in each of your lives, but I'll guarantee you this, if you're a genuine Christian, He is at work to produce unity.

And I suspect He does not allow you to have bad relationships with others, but He's pricking and probing your conscience. And we need to be very much conspiring and moving in the same direction. Brethren, the last word I want to say is this.

We need to be eager. We need people to stand up. We need people who are driving here and they're not just thinking about what they can get.

We need people that are coming to the meetings about what they can give, how they can unite the church, how they can serve, how they can bring people together, how we can be peacemakers. Brethren, if you see anybody at odds in the church, be a peacemaker. Bring them together.

Listen, we need people who are going to stand up and say, yes, I'm one. I'm the man. I'm the woman.

I'm going to stand for unity in this church. The unity of the Spirit. I'm going to guard it.

If you're left to guard something, you've got the gun strapped on your back. You're going to shoot people if they're going to threaten the thing that you're guarding. We need to watch it.

We need to keep watch over it. We need someone who says, is this what the Spirit's striving for? Is this what He's after? Is this what He's seeking to accomplish in this place? Then I'm in. Someone needs to take note of what it is the Spirit wants and they need to rise up.

Say enough! Enough! No gossip. Down with this jealousy. We're not going to get all strung up and out of shape.

Listen, you're a body part. You ought to be able to rejoice with another body part when it gets exalted. We need a church.

Listen, this is counterintuitive to the flesh. There is an entropy. There is a pull.

This is real. You feel it. We can get our feelings hurt.

We don't like the way this was done. We feel slighted. This happened.

That happened. Something happened. There's always things coming.

And the devil's right there to say, oh, see? See? They don't like you. They're this. They're that.

You know what? You need to find another church. You can't... I mean, that is so common. People who church hop.

You know what a church hopper is? A church hopper is somebody that is not eager for the unity of the Spirit. They're just interested in their own selfish desires and whims to go where somebody is going to pet them and pat them on the back. People who come in and say, no, this is my church, and if there's problems, I'm going to set myself to help and heal the problems.

You get the people, oh, there's problems there. Well, of course there is! We're sinners who have been saved. There's lots of problems here.

But if you're looking for that church, then, well, I could get graphic about what you need to do to find that church, but probably if you took that course, you wouldn't find that church. But it doesn't exist in this world. Churches have problems here.

And you know what? Even the good churches, even the Philadelphias and the Philippis and the Smyrnas, probably if you went down and just tracked them for a few years in the distant future, you know what you're going to find? You're going to find that they didn't remain that way. Why? Something crept in. Because the people weren't watching.

The people weren't guarding. And I would say this, if this church degenerates, this church fractures, this church basically dissolves away and the candlestick's removed, brethren, let it be in the next generation, not in ours. Because we're at the watch.

We're going to be eager. This is the first thing. First importance.

You want to know about walking worthy? This. And it's not just protecting this unity within our own ranks. It's protecting that unity between other churches as well.

Christians in other places. We need a church that's going to stand up, not be thin-skinned, easily offended, easily provoked, oversensitive, but start pursuing what? All humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain this. Where are the men and women who are going to do this? Conspire with the Spirit.

Work for the same goal. We maintain it. It's kind of like this.

He hands the unity to God's people when He first saves them. You want to see this? You go look at the New Convert. I remember the New Convert.

Just show me where there's true Christians. And it's like this. Because you're so used to being out there in the darkness.

And when I got saved, there wasn't any internet. I didn't know where they were. And when you find them, it's like, oh, it's a piece of heaven.

And it's like the New Convert, it's like this is given to us by the Spirit. It's wrought by Him. But then you know what happens? Christians move on and as time goes on, we can let this thing dissipate.

We can let it get away from us. We can let the entropy come in. We can let it dissolve.

Don't let it. Fight for it. Fight for this.

I think our usefulness, our togetherness, our keeping fruitful, it depends on this. Oh, and when there's unity, you know what happens? People pray for each other. People love each other.

People aren't quick to be offended by each other, but their love covers a multitude of sins and we've got that atmosphere. We're fighting together. It's like the Philippians and Paul could say about them.

They were in there and they were in the fray and they were fighting together for the sake of a Gospel. That's where we need to be. Fight for it.

Be eager to maintain this. I urge you. That's what Paul is saying.

Urgency! Lord, I pray, may there be the realities of this. May it permeate. Father, I pray that the same one accord, one mind, one heart that moved the early church, especially moved it to love, to not count their own possessions as their own, but to settle so that everybody's needs would be taken care of.

Lord, I pray that those who are selfish about their own needs, selfish about their own vehicles, their own houses, their own retirement, their own stuff, their own safety, their own, their own, their own. Lord, I pray that You would dissolve it through the love of the cross. Wash it by the blood of that cross.

In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

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