

## For This Reason Eph. 4.1-6

“Extra, Extra read all about it!” Starting in the mid-19th century United States, newspaper street vendors would shout “Extra! Extra! Read all about it!” when selling extra editions of the daily or weekly newspaper.

“Extra, Extra read all about it!” Could well have been the words of the person who delivered Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. “Extra, extra read all about God’s blessings!” Paul starts the letter with what in Greek is one long sentence which we read as a series of sentences in vs. 3-14. In addition to listing God’s blessings, this sentence contains a variety of expressions that draw our attention to God’s wisdom, forethought and purpose.

He emphasizes that we have been saved, not only for our personal benefit, but also to bring praise and glory to God. The climax of God’s purpose, “when the times reach their fulfillment,” is to bring all things in the universe together under Christ (1:10).

In chapters two and three Paul lays out God’s purpose and plan starting with a reminder that they were dead in their transgressions and sins and that it was because of God’s great love and through God’s grace that they were saved to do the good works which God had prepared in advance for them to do.

He continues by reminding them that in Christ Jesus they...you know what? I am going to stop saying “they” and say “we” because the truths this letter contains are eternal truths that applied then and apply now and will apply in the future!

So, Paul continues by reminding **us** that **we** are now all one in Christ. There is no longer a separation between us and God or between us and each other. That we are all one body, all God’s people and members of God’s household. Furthermore, Paul declares, in Jesus we are being built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

“For this reason...” because we, that is, the church, are now the new people of God bound together in unity

under Christ, we in turn reveal God's plan to the spiritual powers.

"For this reason..." Paul concludes this section of his letter with a prayer for the Ephesians to experience God's riches, strength, and power, for them to be able to grasp the "breadth and length and height and depth" of Christ's love and be filled with the fullness of God. He goes on to list how to be the new people of God in the down-to-earth, concrete realities of life which now include that of being one people.

Okay, so here we are now at today's passage, Eph. 4.1-6: "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,<sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism,<sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all."

Not too surprisingly Paul begins his list of how to live worthily with humility. That is, the sort of attitude that Jesus displayed when he became a human being. In fact, the Greek word he uses means humility of mind. That is, having an attitude that recognizes the worth and value of other people. I believe he begins his list here because humility is essential to unity.

Think about it for a moment. What is the opposite of humility? Right, pride, and pride almost always results in discord. After all, the people we tend to like are the people who show us the respect we deserve, or at least that we think we deserve.

The ones we don't like are the ones we sense don't like us, or who won't put up with our quirks.

If, however, rather than maneuvering for the respect or regard of others (which is the nature of pride); we give them our respect by recognizing their intrinsic God-given worth, (which is the nature of this humility of mind Paul's talking about), then we'll be promoting harmony in the

Church; which may result in the person responding to us with the same respect they have received.

Second on Paul's list is gentleness which is kind of a tricky word because it is too easily understood as weakness. In fact, to make it even trickier to understand, it has sometimes been translated as meekness which, at least in our day and age, is also equated with weakness.

However, gentleness is better described as self-control, as strength under control. In other words, it is the characteristic of a strong personality who doesn't let their strength control them, nor use it to control others. Rather it is a strength that is used to serve others.

It seems to me that humility and gentleness are a natural pairing because they are words Jesus used to describe himself, "...for I am gentle and humble in heart..." (Matt 11:29) and if we are to become like Jesus then by that very fact they obviously go together.

The next two characteristics on Paul's list also seem to form a natural pairing. Patience and bearing with each other. Patience which is defined as the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, trouble, or suffering without getting angry or upset.

Bearing with each other, or forbearing as it is sometimes translated, can also be understood as having the ability or willingness to tolerate something, particularly the existence of opinions or behaviors that one does not necessarily agree with.

Whew! That is quite a pairing, isn't it? And it ties directly to gentleness as self-control and to humility as recognizing the intrinsic value of each person we meet. And then Paul delivers the frosting on the cake.

The final characteristic in his list is love, which is the overarching quality that is needed to exercise the other four. In other words, it is the controlling force for everything else we do.

So okay, if I'm reading this correctly, we are being told that if we:

- recognize the God given value of each person we meet,

- exercise self-control by being willing to serve that person,
- practice being patient,
- can tolerate differences of opinion and/or behavior and
- do it all with love,

we will be “leading a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called.” Anyone else feeling like this is mission impossible?

Well, once again there is good news! Paul goes on to say that the power of for our unity comes from the from the unity of our God which is the reality into which we’ve all been incorporated:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.”

Please notice that this long list of ones’ centers around the three persons of the Trinity, either by referring to them directly or to things they bring about. So, for example, there’s one body because there is only one Spirit who brings the Church about and only one Lord Jesus who is its head.

There’s one hope, one faith, one baptism, because there’s only one Lord Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life. Finally, although he doesn’t say it explicitly, there is only one family of God because there’s only one Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

So, our unity derives from the fact that the one Father creates the one family, the one Lord Jesus is the focus of the one faith, hope, and baptism, and the one Spirit creates the one body.

When you think of it like that you suddenly realize what someone is doing whose actions damage the unity of the church. What they’re doing is attacking the very unity of the Godhead. How scary is that?!

And when you look around at many churches today you realize we have been very successful at breaking down this unity. Well, the good news is that the unity of the

Godhead isn't damaged but its outworking in the church often is and with it the church's witness to the world.

That's why Paul makes this paradoxical plea in verse three to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. You would think the unity of the Spirit would be indestructible, and it is, yet we are told to maintain it. So why does he say it?

He says it because we live in a fallen world where spiritual realities aren't always seen in the visible church. So, we must work hard if we are to make the unity of the Church a reality in this fallen world.

It's a bit like this: Imagine we have a family, husband, wife and three children. Now imagine that things aren't going well. In fact, they're going very badly. Father and Mother have been at odds for years until they finally separate, then divorce.

The children also argue, first with their parents then with each other, and the family begins to disintegrate. The children move to different states. In fact, they're so at odds that they even legally change their names so they won't have to have anything to do with the rest of their family.

Now suppose we were cousins of this family. How would we react? Would we just shrug our shoulders and say, "Oh well, never mind, they're still one family, you know"? Well, in a sense they are because the facts of birth and heritage can't be removed.

But would we just ignore the situation, denying that this is a tragedy? No! If these people were close to our hearts we'd do our best to encourage them to be reconciled with each other. We'd urge them to maintain the unity of the family by repenting and re-establishing peace within the family.

Well, that's what Paul is saying here. Do your best to maintain that which is the spiritual reality. If you call yourself by the name of the one God and Father, by the one Son; if you rely for your spiritual life on the one Spirit, then make sure the way you live together in the church reflects that.

So why this message about unity now? It is because of the state of our nation where divisiveness seems to be

reaching epidemic proportions. At such a time as this we, the church, need to be bringing a message of hope to the world and one way we can do that is by modeling unity. By showing that it is possible for diverse individuals to not only coexist but to honor and respect each other.

If we practice everything Paul talked about in verse 2, not only will we be a witness to the nation and the world of God's love, we will be living a life that brings glory and honor to the Lord our God.

"Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."