

# Unity in the Body of Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] Would you turn for a wee while this evening to the chapter we read, Ephesians chapter 4, and to the first six verses, Ephesians 4, chapter 4, verses 1 to 6.

I'll just read them very quickly to refresh our memories. As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle.

Be patient, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Now as I look over the congregation, I see scattered here and there there's some young people. And I just want to say a word or two to, well perhaps you don't want to see yourself as boys and girls.

I always tend to think young people is a better way to put it. And I want to say a word or two to you about the sermon tonight. Now I don't know if very many of you always read the Epistle to the Ephesians, but the Epistle to the Ephesians is not a very long letter from Paul, and it divides itself into two parts.

[ 1 : 23 ] The first part really, there's a lot of what we call theology. There's a lot of Paul talking about what it is to be a Christian, what do Christians believe, how do you become a Christian, all sorts of things like that.

And sometimes there's really sort of a verse here and there which is hugely important. That's the first half. The first three chapters are like that. And then the second three chapters are much more to do with how you should live if you're a Christian.

And there's famous bits of it. There's the last chapter where Paul talks about the Christian armor and all the things that the Christian has to protect them against the attacks of the devil and all the things which God has given the Christians to be able to live their lives in the way that he wants them to.

So that's really how the letter to the Ephesians is constructed. And here in this chapter 4, Paul is talking about how Christians should be people who are united.

You know, it means that, and I'm sure this is the case with you young people, that on Sundays you like coming to church because there you meet your friends who perhaps you don't see all that much during the week and you're able to be in Sunday school, Bible class with them.

[ 2 : 45 ] And then after the service you're able to have a chat to them. And it's really good, isn't it? And I hope you all enjoy that. Well, that's what unity is about. And that's what the grown-ups should be thinking about too and what they should be doing.

It's a really good thing for God's people to come together and to talk about the things they agree about and to strengthen each other in their faith. And that's what Christian unity is about.

And in this chapter, Paul is talking about three things, I think. He's talking about the sort of character that leads to Christians being united. He talks about understanding where Christian unity comes from, why at the end of the day Christians are united.

And then he talks about how Christians are people who really should be encouraging there to be union and unity and agreement amongst the Lord's people.

So that's really what the sermon's about. And in the middle of the sermon, I've got a wee story for the young people especially. Okay, so you know what it's all about. You'll be able to understand or keep a track, if you like, on what I'm saying.

[ 3 : 52 ] Well, as I was saying, the first thing we need to note is that there's this sort of, it's a watershed. At the beginning of chapter 4, there's this big change in what Paul is saying as he writes

to the Ephesians, to the church, to the Christians in Ephesus.

He moves from talking about theology to talking about practical matters. He moves from talking about the doctrine, the things which Christians believe, to the Christian duty, what Christians should be doing in their lives.

He moves, as one of the commentators said, from creed to conduct, or from exposition to exhortation. And that's why there's that little word, then, which we can also translate, therefore. It's quite an emphatic word in the original Greek. As a result of these doctrines that I've been talking about, therefore, then, this is how you are to live.

And that's really something for all of us to remember always, that there is this absolute connection between the doctrines of Scripture, rightly understood, how that leads to action.

[ 5 : 02 ] Faith, you see, and works aren't contradictory. They're not alternatives. They belong together. If you actually understand what the Bible teaches, if you understand what the Lord Jesus is telling us about what he himself, who he himself is, what he has done, all the things that we're taught in Scripture will actually do the right things.

Absolutely connected. There's not some sort of dichotomy, some sort of contrast or opposition. Unity and doctrine, the beliefs of the people of the Lord Jesus, there's absolute connection with the way the people of the Lord Jesus live.

And can I just draw your attention also to something else, two key words. Basically, you can divide chapter 4 into two parts.

The first 16 verses are about walking in unity. The Lord's people are to walk in unity. Verses 17 to 31, they're also to walk in purity.

Their lives are to be characterized by purity, by obedience to the laws of God, and not to be characterized by things which are contrary to that.

[ 6 : 18 ] And as I think I said at some point earlier, perhaps it was in the prayer, I think I noticed myself saying that, walking as a Christian indicates steady progress.

A Christian should absolutely not be, and I'm sure you've heard this before, you should absolutely not be content to be where you are spiritually all the time. One of the things which surely must characterize the people who are seeking to follow the Lord Jesus is that they're seeking to make progress.

They're seeking to grow. They don't want to be content with where they are. And if a Christian says or says to themselves, I'm content, well, I'm happy with where I am at the moment, then that's a danger signal.

Be very, very wary for yourselves if you ever attempted to say that. And if you know a fellow Christian who's saying that, then do encourage them not to be content to stay where they are, because for a Christian to stay where you are, the next thing that happens is you start to go backwards.

So these things just by way of introduction. Verse 2 then, where Paul says, be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love, he's talking about the sort of character that leads to Christian unity.

[ 7 : 33 ] And there's four things. There's what's called humility, be completely humble. There's gentleness and gentle. There's patience.

And then there's what Paul, what's translated here, bearing with one another in love. Or can I suggest loving tolerance? That's what I think is the drift of what that last one is.

Well, let's look at them in a bit more detail. First of all, Paul says, be completely humble. Or, if you like, be completely lowly. Now, that is something which the Greco-Roman world, the world of the Greeks and the Romans, almost couldn't get their minds around.

That was something totally alien to what they esteemed. You know, in the world of the Greeks and Romans, what they admired was the sort of great...

Women, of course, sadly, didn't really count in matters like this. And I think we need to be thankful how much things have changed, and especially changed through the result of the Christian faith.

[ 8 : 45 ] But who was admired in the world of the Greeks and the Romans was the sort of great, what they called, the great-souled man, who was completely self-sufficient. And no matter what the world threw at him, he was absolutely firm, unbuffeted, kept a stiff upper lip, and didn't need help from anybody, was able to endure.

There was a whole philosophy like that called stoicism. That was what was admired. And the Romans, in particular, thought that humility was actually something only for slaves. Now, I don't want to go into that. We touched on slavery this morning. But that was the way the Romans saw it. And here was Paul saying, exhorting people to be utterly different from what the society of the time really expected.

And that's quite remarkable when you think about it. What's the sort of thing that Paul is talking about? Well, he's talking about having a low estimate of oneself, not thinking that one is really rather good and better than everybody around.

Not like the Pharisee, certainly, at the temple, who thought he was so much better than the tax collector at the bottom of the steps. But that's a disposition.

[10:03] A disposition not to push oneself forward, to be low, to be unnoticed, to be unpraised. That's why one of the things which characterizes Christians, when they do things for others, they don't look for praise because of it.

They don't look for their status to be increased. Christians are meant to be people who are content, if you like, to be unnoticed, to be unpraised.

And it doesn't lead to self-complacency, and it doesn't lead to self-conceit, and it doesn't certainly lead to self-exhortation. That's the sort of thing that Paul says. If you want Christian unity, unity amongst Christians, wherever they are, then the first thing to seek, to notice, or to check, is that you should be a humble person.

Now, it's not like Uriah Heep in Charles Dickens' novel who goes around saying, I'm so humble. Don't talk about it like that. You just are humble. So do remember that, and don't be Uriah Heep, so we all know that, and I'm sure you've heard that before.

That's the first thing. Second thing is gentleness, or, as it's often translated as an alternative, meekness. Now, when we use the word meek in ordinary everyday language, people, I think, nowadays think wishy-washy.

[11:20] Now, that's not what the word means at all. It doesn't mean remotely timid or spineless or anything like that at all. The word, actually, it's quite a complicated word in a way.

It means strength under control. If you want an example of strength under control, well, think about the Lord Jesus. Remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the temple guard came to arrest him, led by Jesus, and Peter drew his sword, and he cut the, he swung it, and he cut the ear off one of the high priest's servants, the servant of one of the high priest's servants.

And Jesus said to him, put it up. Put your sword up. Do you not think, or do you not remember, as it were, that I could call on 12 legions of angels to defend me, should I want?

12 legions of angels would have swept everything in the Roman Empire absolutely before them. Jesus could have done that, but he didn't. That's meekness.

That's meekness. It's not making a doormat of yourself or something like that. It's strength under control. It's, there's a sort of steel-like quality about Christian meekness.

[12:38] It's, you have the power. You could retaliate, but you don't. You do, and instead you have the ability and you exercise the ability to forgive wrongs that have been done against you.

But it doesn't mean that you don't defend the truth. This Jesus, who could have actually called on 12 legions of angels to come to his defense, and didn't, was also the man who went through the temple courtyard like a whirlwind throwing out those people who were making money for charging excessive amounts for the sacrificial animals which were needed.

The Lord Jesus is the greatest example of meekness that there is, the greatest example of gentleness that there is. And this really, of course, is one of the loveliest attributes that I think you can find in human nature, to have strength but not to exert it, except when it has to be exerted in the interest of truth and things like that.

Meekness, you see, humility, gentleness, sorry, is a virtue of the strong, those who could exert force to get their own way or to retaliate, but who choose not to.

Now, how are we meek people? Are we gentle people? Because that's one of the things that Paul says promotes unity amongst the Lord's people.

[14:12] It's a challenging thought, isn't it? Gentleness, meekness like that. I guess I keep on using the word meekness, and I know here we've got gentleness, but forgive me for that. Pride, self-promoting arrogance, they actually sow disunity, and Christians are not to be people who do that.

So that's the first two, humility and gentleness. And then there's the next one, patience, or as it's sometimes translated, long-suffering.

The word actually literally means long-tempered, long-tempered. It's the virtue that resists provocation. No matter how much people are getting at you, no matter how much people are trying to get you angry, you stay calm, you stay patient.

And you know, that's one of the things where if we do it, we're actually imitating God himself. You know, we know that we are created in the image of God.

That's a profound thought. A huge amount of unpicking necessary to get to grips and to start to understand what it is to be created in the image of God and to bear the image of Christ.

[15:30] But the Lord himself is a God who is long-suffering towards the impenitent. You know, that's what Paul says in Romans, in chapter 2, at verse 4, if you want to follow it up.

Can I tell you what Luther said when he was commenting on this passage? Martin Luther, the great reformer. He said that if I was God and the world was unresponsive to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ like it is, then I would kick the unresponsive world to pieces.

That was Luther. Luther sometimes, as it were, spoke before he really thought. He shouldn't have said that. But in a way, that's not surprising. But Spurgeon, when he was preaching on this, the great Baptist, late 19th century Baptist preacher, when he was preaching on this passage, said this. If you want to follow it up, it's in the Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit for 1887. He says, If you reject him, this is the Lord Jesus, he answers you with tears.

If you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing. If you kill him, he dies to redeem. If you bury him, he rises to bring resurrection.

[16:45] Jesus is love made manifest. And of course, how is it made manifest? Well, by his long suffering. If you reject him, Spurgeon says, he answers you with tears.

If you wound him, he bleeds out cleansing. If you kill him, he dies to redeem. If you bury him, he rises to bring resurrection. Jesus is love made manifest.

Now, God's people must follow God's ways, must follow God's example, must seek to be like him, to be like the Lord Jesus. Of course, we're never going to be quite like him, but we can seek to be more like him.

And believers must look to God's Spirit to help us in these things. And of course, he's promised that to us, that he will, in fact, send his Spirit to us to enable us to do things like this.

So the third thing, then, is patience, or long suffering, or to translate it really literally, it's to be long-tempered. And then, the last one, of the four, bearing with one another in love, or as I've suggested, loving tolerance.

[17:59] Now, Christian unity doesn't begin with some sort of external structure. Many people make that mistake, I think. They think that we have to get the structures in place so that we can be united.

That's one of the things which the ecumenical movement, I think, made a fundamental error about. But let's not go into that. But the Christian unity begins in the attitudes of the heart.

Christian unity begins in the attitudes of the heart. Why is that? Well, Christians, well, we were noticing this this morning, weren't we, about redemption. Christians have been forgiven for their sins at great cost.

And a most important part of the new life is that we live it in Christ. So, Christian love is not affection for the kind of people we like naturally.

It's rather a response to the love which God has shown us in Christ. It's a response to the love that dies to redeem unworthy, unlovable people like us.

[19:10] So, what does it mean? It means that Christians' love because of what they have become. God loves the unworthy and we are to do that too.

Believers are people who have been died for and part of our response to the atoning death of the Lord Jesus is love. Love for the God who saved us, love for the Lord Jesus Christ who died on the cross for us, and love for the people God loves.

Even though that can be right trying sometimes, but that's what we are called on to be and that's what we are called on to do. We are to be tolerant of people who in a way perhaps don't deserve toleration, and we are to love people who don't in a way deserve to be loved perhaps because of what we've become and what they have become too.

We are to bear with one another in love. We are to put up with one another in love because let's face it, sometimes we are far from what we should be, but that doesn't mean to say that we can't say, well, even though so-and-so as a Christian, I can't stand them anymore because that's not what the Lord did.

It's not what the Lord Jesus Christ did, and we are not to either. So those are the four things that Paul identifies as making up the character that leads to God's, his people, the people of the Lord Jesus being united.

[ 20 : 50 ] Those four things, humility, gentleness, patience, and loving tolerance. But then Paul goes on to talk about where this all comes from, the origin of Christian unity, and he says in verses three, in verse three in particular, sorry, three through to six, he talks about the origin of it, sorry, four to six, he says that each, that there are seven types of unity, and each one of them is connected with one person of the Trinity, the triune God, the God who has three persons, who has three persons in one, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and Paul says each of those has a particular relevance to how we are to be.

Let's look at them in more detail. Verse four, first of all, there is one body and one spirit. The person of the Holy Spirit has a direct relevance to the unity of Christ's people.

Now, the body that Paul is talking about there is the church. Now, Paul thought very definitely of one church in his day.

He didn't talk about the Jewish church and the Gentile church like sometimes theologians have talked about. He didn't see it that way. He saw there as being one church. He said, oh yes, I'm the apostle to the Gentiles.

But he didn't say, I'm the apostle to the Gentile church. He was the apostle to the Gentiles, the Jews, the Gentiles. If they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and had faith in him, they were one church.

[ 22 : 33 ] Now, we all know, of course, the church is terribly fragmented today. Denominations, divisions within denominations, divisions sometimes even within congregation. Fragmentation and division in the Christian church is something which is a huge blot on it and we are struggling with it all the time, aren't we?

But for Paul, the unity of believers was very, very, very important. And I sometimes think, I think it's true, isn't it, that sometimes we don't focus on the unity of the Lord's people, the unity of believers just as much as we should.

Now, Paul sees that the Holy Spirit creates a body of Christian believers, the body of Christ as it's sometimes called on earth, of which we are all members.

and that explains the soul fellowship, fellowship of the soul that we have with other believers from diverse backgrounds.

Now, I can't, I think I've heard this since I was last here. Forgive me if I've told you this before. I'm not sure I totally agree with what it expresses, but I think it throws light on what Paul is saying here.

[ 23 : 45 ] I was hearing about a Scottish believer who actually met a believer from China or Korea or somewhere in Asia. And as he met him, he smiled at him.

And he seems to, the Scottish, I think it was a man, suddenly realized, hey, I'm smiling at somebody I've only just met. And he said to the Asian believer, you know, it's amazing, I've only just met you and here I am smiling at you as if you're a long lost friend.

And the Asian believer said, ah, it's the Jesus in you smiling at the Jesus in me. Okay, don't follow it too far, don't take it to some sort of illogical conclusion, but there's a great truth in that, isn't there?

And Paul says that that's the doing of the Holy Spirit. That's the sort of thing that God's Spirit does for Christians. He actually creates, if you like, the unity that Christians have, the unity which exists in the body of Christ and which we have with believers from all over the world.

You know, I think I probably have quoted Martin Bouser to you years ago, it's some time since I've been preaching here. Martin Bouser, one of the great reformers, we don't hear about so much, of him so much, but he actually had a huge influence on John Calvin.

[ 25 : 11 ] Martin Bouser was the Strasbourg reformer and one of the things which he said is this, and I think it's well worth thinking about and well worth reflecting on, putting into practice.

He said, I will have fellowship with anyone in whom I see anything of the Lord Jesus. Now that's a challenge, isn't it? It doesn't mean to say we've got to agree with everything that other Christian believers believe or how they interpret the scriptures, but we are to have fellowship with everyone in

whom we can see anything of the Lord Jesus.

And I think that far too often, in all parts of the church probably, that great imperative has been lost sight of, rather. It's important to remember it, have fellowship with anyone in whom we see anything of the Lord Jesus.

So there's one body and one spirit, and then he says, Paul says, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, or one hope of your calling, as it's sometimes translated.

That's the importance of having a united vision. Christians are to be people with a united vision.

Now here's the story for the young people. You young people, you all ready?

[ 26 : 24 ] Here's the story for you. I don't know how many of you have been in London, I suppose most of you have been in London, and you'll have seen pictures, even if you haven't been in London, of St. Paul's Cathedral, St. Paul's Cathedral with the great big dome shining out above all the other buildings, and possibly some of you have seen pictures of St. Paul's during World War II when there were bombs dropping, and above all the smoke of the buildings that were crashing and the fires that were burning, there was the dome of St. Paul's standing unscathed, wasn't touched the whole war.

Well, St. Paul's didn't used to look like that. St. Paul's used to look more like Westminster Abbey, which you've possibly seen, the church where the kings and the queens get crowned. Well, in the 1660s, there was this huge fire in London, the Great Fire of London, and St. Paul's was actually burnt to the ground.

The roof fell in, it was a total mess. And the great architect, Sir Christopher Wren, was appointed to design the rebuilding of all the churches which had been burned in the Great Fire.

And the biggest project, was rebuilding St. Paul's. And the king, King Charles II, one day went to see how it was going. And there were all the stonemasons there, you know, hammering away at the stone and getting the big stone blocks into the right shape and all that.

And the king went to one stonemason and he said, presumably something like, my man, what are you doing? And this stonemason said, I'm shaping a stone. Perfectly true.

[ 27 : 59 ] That's what he was doing, shaping a stone. Hour after hour he chipped away at it to make it square and smooth and everything. Quite right. King went to another man and he said to the other man, what are you doing?

And he said, I'm earning a living. Well, that's true too. He was getting paid for his work hammering away at stones and putting them together. And the king went to a third stonemason and he said, and what about you?

What are you doing? And this man said, I'm helping Christopher Wren to build a cathedral. I'm helping Christopher Wren to build a cathedral.

The other men were just either looking at the stone and not thinking more than that or thinking about their families back home. But this third man saw really that he was playing a part in something so much bigger.

He was a person of vision. And you know, you young people, Christians are meant to be like that. Christians are meant to be people who don't just think about themselves and indeed don't just think about their families.

[ 29 : 14 ] They're meant to be people who are thinking about Christ's kingdom. Thinking about the way in which Christians, people all over the world are becoming Christians and how they and their families are part of that.

And they're meant to be people who are thinking about what it's going to be like in heaven when all the people of the Lord Jesus Christ will be together and we'll start to see how our little bit, our little bit that we did for the Lord Jesus, how it fits together.

You know, sometimes Christians are people who think that what they're doing is pretty insignificant, not doing very much. but in actual fact, every single believer is doing something which is absolutely integral to the kingdom of heaven.

It's a great thought, isn't it? We mightn't think we're doing all that, it's all that important, but oh yes it is. It absolutely fits together and we'll see the time will come when we will see how it all fits together and how the Lord Jesus, he's the one that is the capstone or the cornerstone as the Bible tells us.

So I want you young people to remember about Sir Christopher Wren and the questions which the king asked and really the mantra remember is what that stonemason hammering away at his stone said, he said, I'm helping Christopher Wren to build a cathedral.

[ 30 : 42 ] Absolutely right. So Christians are to be like that. Whatever our job is, whatever our responsibilities in the Christian church are, whatever our responsibilities amongst the Lord's people are, we are actually helping the Lord to do his work in the world and it's his Holy Spirit who does that, enables us to be like that.

Paul says then, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one Lord. The Lord Jesus, he is the only Lord, he's the one which every one of us surely who's a Christian here tonight, is seeking to honor not just as we worship, but in everything that we do.

Can I take you back to the early Christians? You know, when the Roman Empire started to persecute them, you know, to avoid being martyred, to avoid ending up in the amphitheater being thrown to the wild animals and all the things that happened to them, do you know, all that they had to do was to go to a temple, take a little pinch of incense and drop it on the fire that was always burning on the altar and say, Caesar is Lord.

That was all they had to do. One little pinch of incense, drop it on the fire and say those three words, Caesar is Lord. And they couldn't bring themselves to do it.

Why couldn't they bring themselves to do it? Because they had this amazing discovery. Jesus is Lord. The Jewish believers, that was the big thing for the Jewish believers.

[ 32 : 30 ] The Christian Jews could never sort of get over how amazing it was that the man who they had walked with and talked with and how they'd heard about from the apostles who'd walked and talked with him, that he was actually God.

He was Lord. And it was such a marvelous understanding that they couldn't bring themselves, even at the risk of their very lives, to say the word Caesar is Lord.

Because no, he wasn't Lord, Jesus was Lord. That's a huge discovery. And that's what Paul is saying here. One Lord, one faith, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ is absolutely fundamental he's the only way to salvation.

The way of faith is through Christ and there is no other alternative. Christianity doesn't know a variety of ways of being saved. That's why things like the multi-faith process are so, so wrong. It's a compromise of the basic truth of Christianity that he is the only name given whereby men, women, young people can be saved. That's this great truth, so, so potent for the early believers, and does it make the same sort of impact on us?

[ 33 : 51 ] We are living in a world which is every bit as opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Romans were, you know for most of it. And we as Christians are called on to be willing to stand up and say, Jesus is Lord, and we will follow him.

Maybe, the days are getting closer, then we may have to do something not dissimilar from what those early Christians had to do. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, well, we all know that the Christian church is divided into those who baptize infants and those who won't and only baptize believers.

But let me say this, not wanting to get into that argument at the moment or difference of opinion. What I want to say is this, and I think this is what Paul is really driving at.

Baptism is the outward mark of an inward faith. And if it's not, if it doesn't speak of an inward faith, then it's not effective.

Baptism is effective because it's a mark of an inward faith. That's true whether it's believers baptism that you're endorsing, or whether it's Peter baptism and the baptism of infants you're endorsing, if the parents don't have faith, if the person doesn't come to faith, it's not effective.

[ 35 : 14 ] I hope that there aren't any of you here tonight basically saying in the back of your mind, I've been baptized, I'm okay. Because if you haven't got an inward faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're not okay.

Baptism is effective because it's the mark of an inward faith. That's what Paul is saying, one Lord, one faith, one baptism. And then he says, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

We've got a shared paternity. We are all family. Everyone who belongs to the Lord Jesus is part of one family. And all that's best in human fatherhood, and indeed many, many other things as well, can be ascribed to God, who is our Father, who is the father of every Christian believer.

God, and as a result of that, we know that God loves his people, and he cares for his people, and we can trust him completely because he will care for us unceasingly, and he'll provide for our every need.

Now, Paul says our unity comes from these seven great unities, which he delineates here, and which he says are all rooted in the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[ 36 : 35 ] And our unity, the unity of the people of the Lord Jesus is unbreakable. The unity of the church is ultimately undestructible. And yes, you and I, if we are believers, will never ever be separated.

It's great, isn't it? Great. It's marvelous. Transcends human relationships. We can be separated from parents if they're not believers, sadly, but we'll never be separated from them if they are believers.

Or make certain that you witness to your children, that you witness to your parents and your brothers and sisters. It's crucially important if you want not to be separated from them. Now, I know that in heaven there's no sadness.

We won't be aware of it. We'll be absolutely overwhelmed by the love of God and life in his presence. But from the perspective of here on earth, let's remember that if you've got God as your father, the Lord Jesus Christ as your elder brother, you won't know separation from them or from those who are your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verse 3, we'll have to be quick because the time has gone, the bond of peace. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. The force of verse 3 is something like, do your utmost to keep the unity of the Spirit.

[ 37 : 54 ] This is urgent. because there were divisions in the early churches as well. Paul's word doesn't really allow for the possibility of failure. Now that's of tremendous significance for every local church.

There's no room for rivalry, there's no room for factions, there's no room for hatreds, there's really no room for disunity. We're to focus on God, who is the root and the origin of our unity. unity. And this is something which believers don't bring about. This is something which is done for us by Christ, and we are to keep it.

That's what's important. That's what Paul's saying. Now down through the centuries, I think the church just hasn't given enough attention to Paul's injunction here. But we are to show diligence. We are to actually do what we can to make certain that the Lord's people are united. Occasionally, there may be times when we can't succeed, but that shouldn't be our fault.

[ 38 : 57 ] We should all put forward our best efforts to be diligent to maintain the unity of the people of the Lord Jesus. Sometimes, sadly, division is necessary because of strong differences of principle or great differences of interpretation of what Scripture means.

But there should be a strong... And sometimes it is necessary to take a strong stand against other believers in the face sometimes of strong opposition. But that doesn't give us license to ignore the apostles' directions.

We have got to strive to be united. We've got to promote this unity rather than to hinder it. And I think down through the ages, the church hasn't paid enough attention to it.

One last thing. This word, the bond of peace, keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, the word literary is a not sort of word, it's the with bond, W-I-T-H, the with bond.

I think what Paul is meaning when he uses this word is that believers are united by a bond which includes the thought of witness.

[ 40 : 08 ] When we think of the Lord's people, we must always think of this idea, we are with them, witness, togetherness. Can't get away from it, that's the idea of it.

And Paul really hammers at this truth that believers belong with one another. So the bond of peace is the with bond.

I'll just conclude by saying one thing, are we all doing enough to promote this unity? Can we do more? Can I do more? Can you do more? It's something which the Christian church surely needs. We need to see more unity, don't we, across the whole Christian church. on the basis of the truths of Scripture. May it be so for us all, and we have good reason to praise God for uniting us closer and closer together with his people everywhere.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.