

Eph 4:2–3 (ESV) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ⁽³⁾ eager to maintain *the unity of the Spirit* in the bond of peace.

1. Where we’ve been – quick review

- A. Been looking at “Walking in the Spirit.”
 - 1). This has taken us to Eph. 5:18 – and the command to be filled with the Spirit
- B. There is a beautiful picture the words “Be filled” paints in the Greek
Eph 5:18 (ESV) And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, *but be filled with the Spirit*,
 - 1). It is the picture of the wind filling the sails of a boat and driving it forward
 - 2). That is what happens when the believer is filled with the Spirit
 - a). We live the Christian life propelled along by His power
- C. We saw that to be filled with the Spirit – is not mystical – it is simply yielding
 - 1). Why Paul used the analogy of drunkenness
 - a). When a person is drunk they are dominated – controlled by alcohol
 When a person is filled with the Spirit – they are dominated – controlled by Him
- D. We then went to John 15 - saw as we do that – we remain connected to Christ in a vital matter
 We called that living life as a branch
 - 1). His life pours into us – and through the Spirit is lived out through us
 - 2). We saw this is what some call the exchanged life
 - a). Where our weakness is exchanged with His power
 - b). Our anxiety is exchanged with His peace
 - c). Our inabilities are exchanged for His ability
- E. We looked at how this exchanged life is lived out practically
 - 1). We must remain connected – we don’t allow sin to break fellowship with Christ
 - 2). We must practice dependence – we live in a moment-by- moment dependence upon the Spirit
 - a). We trust Him to live out Christ’s peace when tempted with anxiety
 Christ control – when tempted with sin. Christ love when tempted with hatred
 Christ ability to minister effectively

2. Problem – so few believers seem to arrive at this point of dependence

- A. This point of resting in the Spirit’s power
 - 1). Instead, they flail away in their own strength and wonder why nothing seems to be working
- B. They become frustrated. “Christianity seems to promise so much, but deliver so little.”
 - 1). *Could it be – you’re trying to push the boat forward with no wind in the sails?*

Question: Does this describe you?

There seems to be a disconnect between your spiritual experience and what you see in the Bible

- A. Let me say this. You’re not alone.
 - 1). What has happened? Why is Christianity so dull in so much of the church today?
 - 2). I’ve often said – if the Apostle Paul came to observe the church today
 Would he even recognize it as Christianity?
 - a). Would He wonder, where is God? Where is the power of the Spirit?
- B. I’m a biography addict. I’m usually reading one – right now “Adoniram Judson”
 - 1). I love to read these stories about the men in the past – their example inspires me
 Whitefield, Spurgeon, Booth, Luther, Mueller, Lloyd-jones. Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward
 - a). God radiated from them. Christ-saturated, Spirit-filled men and women
 - b). Believers who decided Christ was a greater treasure than anything the world could offer

1a). Therefore, men and women God could entrust with the work of His kingdom

Question: But what has happened to us? Something seems to have gone wrong

- A. I was talking with a brother – a good solid Bible man
Listen to his complaint: "we've learned doctrine all our life, but somehow Jesus got left out of the mix."
1). In other words - we know all about him, but fall short in our love and experience of him
- B. I remember speaking to an elder of a church in England I was going to teach at
He brought the same subject up
"I think we've missed something somewhere. We know our doctrine well, but somehow God is missing in our experience."
1). After preaching in his church – his wife approached me
"I need Jesus in my life. Somehow, somewhere that first love experience has left, I want it back."
- C. I hear these things repeatedly
"I can remember when I was first born again. The love I had for Jesus, and the love I felt from Jesus were amazing. But that's not my experience now, I want that back."
1). This is from good, solid Bible people
a). Who understand those God glorifying, God exalting doctrines
But that truth meant to point them to God, doesn't seem to take them to Him at all.

Question: What has happened? How can people who know God live such dull Christian lives?

- A. How can people who know the God who created all we see have so little adventure in their Christianity?
- B. Could this be the result of today's optional Christianity
1). What I mean - a Christianity that sees obedience as optional
a). A Christianity that can read the Scriptures but not obey the Scriptures
And then deceive themselves thinking God is still going to show up
2). He won't! That is Christianity on man's terms not God's
a). *That will result in living out Christianity without wind in the sails*
- C. You cannot neglect the truth that disobedience severs fellowship with Christ and grieves the Spirit
1). And leaves you in a place where you are living out your Christianity in your own strength
a). That is a Christianity that cannot work – it will always end up leaving you frustrated
b). That will never lead you to the abundant life Christ promised to bring us

Point: This is why the Spirit-filled life is necessary

You need wind in your sails – you need a power that is beyond your own

- A. And this is why you need to deliberately make a choice to obey
1). You must determine to yield to the Spirit – and apply what He's told you in His Word
a). What the Bible forbids you to do – you must stop doing it!
b). What the Bible tells you to do – you must start doing that!
- B. This will open the door to the Spirit's power flowing into your life
1). And this will open the door to experiencing God in your life
Jn 14:21 (ESV) Whoever has my commandments *and keeps them*, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and *manifest myself to him.*"

Question: Are you living a Christ-less Christianity?

- A. Here is where I'd check first. Are there points of disobedience in your life?
1). You cannot live a victorious, joy-filled Christian life and allow it
"Nothing will stop your song quicker than your sin."
- B. Just because you're a child of God does not mean you can sin with impunity

CHS: It is a glorious truth that God will keep his people, but it is an abominable falsehood that sin will do them no harm.

- 1). God has determined that trouble and sin will not be inseparable
 - a). Therefore, sin will always result in shame – guilt – fear – worry
Sin will not be allowed to enhance life – it will always reduce it
- 2). The only way to remedy that is through confession and repentance

Point: If you want to enjoy the Spirit-filled life – the exchanged life

- A. You must live out the connected life – that vital connection to Christ – sin severs that fellowship

3. Where we are going?

- A. I could use any command in the Bible and investigate this
 - 1). Are we yielding ourselves – are we living it out
Or are we disobedient and therefore walking in a way that makes all this impossible
- B. I want to talk about the whole idea of Christian unity – been on my heart lately
 - 1). I want to get you thinking in a way that these scriptural commands cannot be ignored

I. CHRISTIAN UNITY

1. Is God serious about unity in the body of Christ

Eph 4:1–6 (ESV) I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ⁽²⁾ with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ⁽³⁾ *eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁽⁴⁾ There is *one body* and *one Spirit*—just as you were called to the *one hope* that belongs to your call— ⁽⁵⁾ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism,* ⁽⁶⁾ *one God and Father of all*, who is over all and through all and in all.

Jn 17:21–23 (ESV) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ⁽²²⁾ The glory that you have given me I have given to them, *that they may be one even as we are one,* ⁽²³⁾ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

1 Co 12:12–13 (ESV) For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ⁽¹³⁾ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

- A. Looking at these passages leaves no doubt God is serious about unity in His kingdom
 - 1). Jesus prayed that we would be one as He and the Father are one – John 17:22
 - 2). Paul tells us we should be eager to maintain the unity of that oneness – Eph 4:3
 - 3). Because the body is one body – 1 Cor. 12:12-13
 - 4). To walk in unity is to walk in a manner worthy of our calling – Eph. 4:1

Question: Why is this idea of unity important to our previous discussion?

What does this have to do with a dull, Christ-less Christianity?

- A. I fear we take commands like this far too lightly – we feel we can fight with people
 - 1). Gossip, cause discord, hang on to bitterness and it won't matter
- B. But if we're not walking in unity – then *we are not yielded to the Spirit*
 - 1). If we are not yielded to the Spirit we are not filled with the Spirit
 - 2). Therefore we are walking in our own power – and Christianity won't work like that

Eph 4:3 (NIV) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

- A. Don't put that into practice – allow yourselves to fight and bicker – be bitter
You take the wind out of your sails
 - 1). You are not in a place of obedience where God will manifest Himself to you

- B. Again – I want to drive this point home – because it has gone missing in today’s Christianity
Jn 14:21 (ESV) Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him *and manifest myself to him.*”
- 1). Whoever has his commandments and keeps them will experience God in their life
 - a). Whoever has His commandment and is a hearer only and not a doer
 Will forfeit being Spirit-filled and will lose the presence of God in their life
 - 1a). The only way back is through confession and repentance

2. Why is this on my heart this morning? This whole thought of unity

- A. First – because of the world we live in
- 1). We live in an angry – divided world – everybody seems mad at everybody else
 - 2). The United States is not united - there is an anger boiling underneath the surface
 - a). We could go to Romans to show this is evidence of God’s judgment
 The results of rejecting God and God turning us over to ourselves
- B. Unfortunately – the church always seems to reflect the world to some degree
 “I went looking for the church in the world and found the world in the church.”
- 1). I hear about believers fighting with one another regularly
 - 2). I go onto Facebook and the arguments are insane
 - a). Christians making mountains out of molehills
 Fighting about petty little things that make no difference at all
 - 1a). Treating each other with contempt – in front of a watching world
Jn 13:35 (ESV) By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”
 - 3). I imagine they think the internet gives them some anonymity
 Therefore they can act that way with impunity – but God sees!
 - 4). God sees the fighting – He sees the divisions – He sees the pride that fuels it all
 - a). He sees the disobedience to His clear commands for love and unity
 - b). His Spirit is grieved – His power is pulled – He stops manifesting Himself to you
 - 1a). AND your Christianity becomes a dry – shriveled up thing

I see this between different schools of thought in Christianity

1. I think we need to learn to settle our differences a little better

- A. We don’t have to fight about everything
- 1). The Calvinist fight with Armenians – Reformers with Charismatics
 - 2). I’ve seen Calvinist say Armenians can’t be saved (that would be most Calvary chapels)
 I’ve also seen Armenians say Calvinist can’t be saved (That would be people like Spurgeon)
 - a). We don’t have time to detail these out – one Wednesday night we will
- B. I think we need to find a greater tolerance over what we should be tolerant about
- 1). I love the way one puritan put it
 “The more mature we are the less denominational we will be”
 - a). I think maturity is able to accept those who don’t think exactly like us
 It is able to process the truth – they are brothers and sisters – part of the family
- C. One thing we learned in England was the beauty of the body of Christ
- 1). We’d gone over there with a bit of Calvary pride – only we know how to really do it
 - a). But there were no Calvary’s around us – closest was Brian in London

- 2). For us to fellowship we had to break outside – into other denominations – it was wonderful
 - a). We found ourselves mixing with the Baptists – Bretheren – non-denominational
Some were creationists who thought the gifts had ceased – some were not
 - b). Some believed in the rapture and the coming 1000-year millennial reign of Christ
Others were amillennial and didn't believe in a literal 1000-year reign of Christ
 - c). Some were extremely formal – others informal – head coverings
- 3). It was the best thing that could ever happen to us
 - a). We truly saw the multi-faceted beauty of the body of Christ
 - 1a). It helped us move beyond petty differences that would have divided us before
 - b). Where I would have been critical of those feeling they needed to wear head coverings
I saw they were wonderful sisters just wanting to please their Lord

Thought: Carri and I started to see the beauty of all the differences

- A. The expressions of worship were vastly different
 - 1). Honestly I liked some more than others – but here's the thing – IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT ME
 - a). It's all about Christ and I'm sure He was pleased as they expressed themselves to Him
- B. I was forced to listen to people who were outside of the usual circles in my studies
 - 1). I started to see different angles of the truth that enriched me
 - a). My theology was challenged in a good way

Summary: All this to say – as a body of Christ there is room for diversity

There is room to express ourselves in different ways – there is room for differing opinions

- A. We don't have to be fighting so much – there needs to be more tolerance for unity's sake

Transition: Now I know I've just frightened some of you

"Here we go! It doesn't matter what a person believes, what a church teaches, just tolerate it for the sake of unity. Now we've just stepped onto that slippery slope. We'll probably be a cult within a matter of minutes!"

- A. Before we all get up and run around like our hairs on fire – let me explain

Tolerance Must Be Balanced

1. We are to be tolerant on the non-essentials

- A. How the end times are going to play out. How we express ourselves in worship
Are the gifts for today? Styles of church government etc.
 - 1). There is room for disagreement here
 - a). Scriptures aren't black and white – there is gray areas to be interpreted
 - 2). Unfortunately - people are standing toe-to-toe on things like this – hating on one another
 - a). I don't think God is glorified when we divide over these things
 - b). Church in England – some thought songs written after 1838 weren't of God
They'd all be standing – a modern song – from 1840's would be played – they sat
- B. We can have conversations about our differences – get along - one of my favorite things in England
 - 1). There were gray issues – where some in the congregation disagreed with me
 - a). I told them – you don't have to agree with me on everything
But when you don't have a Biblical reason for it
 - b). We would sit and talk after a service – we would disagree – and it was great
I'd give my scriptural argument – they'd give theirs
At the end we'd stand up and hug – was great – iron sharpening iron – true fellowship
 - 2). ***But we were on the same page with the essentials***

Transition: Here is the balance – tolerance on the non-essentials but not on the essentials

2. We cannot be tolerant on the essentials – will not budge an inch

A. Essentials would be things like

Justification by faith alone by grace alone in Christ alone.

The deity of Christ. – if you don't believe He is God you are not saved

The incarnation of Christ. The atonement of Christ: He paid the penalty for your sin

The resurrection and return of Christ

The depravity of man and the need of salvation

1). There may be a few more I've overlooked

But on these I will not back down in the slightest – these are non-negotiables

B. We are not saying we tolerate heresy for the sake of unity

John Blanchard: When the Bible speaks about church unity, it speaks of unity not at the expense of truth but on the basis of it.

1). We find our unity on the basis of agreeing on the essentials – that is our unity

a). While choosing not to fight over the non-essentials

b). Rupertus Medinius struck a good balance in this

"In essentials unity. In non-essentials liberty. In all things charity."

3. Therefore we can get along with other churches that aren't just like us

A. There are many churches out there that differ with in the gray areas

But would get along just fine with in the essentials

1). There we must choose charity – we must stop fighting with these folk

Facebook people need to stop arguing so much – it doesn't bring glory to God

B. One of my favorite examples is from Charles Simeon

1). He was the godly chaplain of holy Trinity in Cambridge for 55 years until 1836.

a). Simeon was a Calvinist, I want to read the account of his meeting with John Wesley who was an Arminian.

b). The reason I want to read this, is to show you the charity of Charles Simeon in this matter.

"My endeavor," he wrote, "is to bring out of Scripture what is there and not to trust in what I think might be there." He also said, "Take the Word as little children without enquiring what human system it appears to favor." (OTW read your Bible and see what it really says...not what the Charismatics say it says...or what the Reformers say it says) Simeon made it clear that he was neither a Calvinist nor an Arminian, **but rather a Bible Christian**. "Be a Bible Christian and not a system Christian," he advised his students.

Of course, in Simeon's day, the great controversy over doctrine centered around John Wesley the Arminian, and George Whitefield, the Calvinist. Simeon had a delightful personal meeting with Wesley on December 20, 1784. Wesley recorded in his journal: "I went to Hoxworth, where I had the satisfaction of meeting Mr. Simeon.... He gave me the pleasing information, that there are three parish churches in Cambridge, wherein true scriptural religion is preached; and several young gentlemen who are happy partakers of it." But Simeon has left us with a more complete record of the conversation.

"Sir," said Simeon to Wesley, "I understand that you are called an Arminian; and I have been sometimes called a Calvinist; and therefore I suppose we are to draw daggers. But before I consent to begin the combat, with your permission I will ask you a few questions, not from impertinent curiosity, but for real instruction. Pray, Sir, do you feel yourself a depraved creature, so depraved that you would never have thought of turning to God if God had not first put it into your heart?"

"Yes, I do indeed," Wesley replied.

"And do you utterly despair of recommending yourself to God by anything you can do; and look for salvation solely through the blood and righteousness of Christ?"

"Yes, solely through Christ."

"But, sir, supposing you were first saved by Christ, are you not somehow or other to save yourself afterwards by your own works?"

"No; I must be saved by Christ from first to last."

"Allowing then that you were first turned by the grace of God, are you not in some way or other to keep yourself by your own power?"

"No."

"What, then, are you to be upheld every hour and every moment by God, as much as an infant in its mother's arms?"

"Yes, altogether."

"And is all your hope in the grace and mercy of God to preserve you unto his heavenly kingdom?"

"Yes, I have no hope but in him."

"Then, sir, with your leave, I will put up my dagger again; for this is all my Calvinism; this is my election, my justification by faith, my final perseverance: it is, in substance, all that I hold, and as I hold it: and therefore, if you please, *instead of searching out terms and phrases to be a ground of contention between us, we will cordially unite in those things wherein we agree.*"

- 1). I like the spirit of that – I don't want to be hypercritical over the wrong things
 - a). I used to be and it was just a waste of time
- 2). At the same time we need to be critical when there is heresy in the fundamentals
 - a). You start claiming salvation is by works and I will confront you on that heresy.
 - b). You say Jesus Christ isn't eternal, Almighty God. A created being rather than the Creator
 - 1a). We certainly can't let that slide
 - c). If you say man is not inherently sinful, and in desperate need of a Savior – no thanks
 - d). If you start adding to the Bible what is not Biblical – we'll have a problem
- 3). But in those gray areas that aren't the essentials of the faith
May the Lord give me the grace to extend liberty to you

CONCLUSION

1. Some thoughts on unity for Christians who divide so easily today

- A. You choose to alienate yourself from your brother and sister – you lose
- B. Those who fight over everything on Facebook – being disrespectful – rather than dialoguing - lose
 - 1). You cannot be Spirit-filled and not yielded to the Scriptures at the same time
 - 2). If you're not Spirit-filled there is no wind in your sails – you live Christianity on your own