

## **Grow: Unity is Essential for Growth**

Ephesians 4:1-10

After praying for the believers to be strengthened by God's Spirit in their inner being, and after praying for growth in their understanding of Christ's love, Paul gets very specific about the way they were to behave as believers.

Belief always impacts behavior. Doctrine results in duty.

**John MacArthur** - *"Too many Christians are glad to have the spiritual security, blessings, and promises of the gospel but have too little sense of responsibility in conforming to its standards and obeying its commands."*

Spiritual growth is the believer becoming more and more in practice who he or she is in position. This is true individually as well as collectively in the body of Christ.

Spiritual growth does not happen in isolation from other believers. Growth is the result of unity in the body.

What is unity? We need to understand what it is and why it is so extremely important to growth in the body of Christ.

- it is not uniformity
- it is not unanimous
- it is not unintentional

Unity in the body of Christ is essential for growth in the body of Christ. Believers who are growing and maturing in the faith will be unified in their relationships with other believers in the family.

As far as growth in the body of Christ is concerned, there cannot be any growth apart from unity. This is the reason why Jesus devoted much of His High Priestly prayer in John 17 to the subject of unity among His disciples:

**John 17:20-23 - “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, 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. The glory that You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 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.”**

This shows us how much is really at stake in the church’s unity. The glory of God and the witness of the gospel are tied to the unity in which God’s people are to live.

Without unity, the disciples would never have made an impact in their world with the gospel. It would have stopped with them.

We need to consider how is unity essential to spiritual growth, and just what exactly it involves in our lives as Christ’s disciples.

### **1. Unity is CULTIVATED in a relationship of growth (4:1-3)**

*“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.”*

By saying that unity is cultivated, I am intentionally implying that unity is something that does not happen by accident or coincidence. As believers are in a growing relationship with God and with their fellow believers, unity is produced by God’s Spirit in the body of Christ.

Paul is calling on believers to be intentional about unity.

Paul would never ask the believers to live in a particular way or do something that he himself would not do. He modeled before their eyes what spiritual growth looks like.

**“Prisoner for the Lord”** - *reminder that following Jesus is costly; willing to pay the price of discipleship*

This is a strong statement that acknowledges the providence of God and the sovereignty of God. Paul did not refer to himself as a prisoner of Rome; he referred to himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

He saw things vertically before he saw them horizontally.

**“Urge You”** - *coming alongside the believers (plural)*

**“Walk”** - *frequently used in Scripture to refer to the pattern of one’s daily behavior*

The believer who walks worthy of the calling with which he has been called is one whose daily life corresponds with his faith in Christ. He is becoming in practice who he is in position. His faith in Christ is not just talk; it is the walk of his life.

Paul lists several character traits that are true of believers who are growing in their faith, each of which are vital for unity:

### Humility

This virtue is foundational to the Christian life. There is no following Christ without humility. It is an elusive virtue, because as soon as you’ve discovered that you have it, you’ve lost it.

**Bernard of Clairvaux** - *“[Humility is] the virtue by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness.”*

Humility demands that a believer possess:

- a proper view of self
- a proper view God
- a proper view of others

Humility is Christ first, others second, and self last.

The Bible says that Jesus perfectly embodied true humility. Paul writes in Philippians that unity in the body is connected to humility being demonstrated in the lives of believers.

**Philippians 2:2-5 - “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.”**

Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

**1 John 2:6 - “Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”**

Even though humility is at the core of the disciple’s character, keep in mind that it is totally foreign to the world. The world emphasizes pride and making much of oneself.

On one occasion, the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest. They wanted to know who would be sitting at Jesus’ right hand. Jesus blew them all away when on the night of the Last Supper, He took a towel, tied it around His waist, and got down and washed their feet.

Everyone wants the throne, while no one wants the towel.

**John 13:14-15 - “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”**

- Pride is the sin of competing with God; humility is the virtue of submitting to God.
- Pride keeps us at a distance from God; humility brings us to His feet.
- Pride is the attitude of the world; humility is the attitude of Christ’s kingdom.
- Pride is the root of all other sins; humility is the root of all other virtues.

- Pride is behind every conflict we have with others; humility is behind every growing and fulfilled relationship.

### Gentleness

The next character trait that is essential to unity in the body is that of gentleness or meekness. The word that is used refers to that which is mild-spirited, self-controlled, and the opposite of vindictiveness.

The word for “gentleness” does not mean weakness, timidity, indifference, or lack of courage.

The word was used to describe wild animals that had been tamed, such as horses that had been broken and bridled. The bridled horse is still a very strong animal, but it is now under the control of its master.

Gentleness or meekness in the biblical sense is power that is under control. It is the picture of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane being placed under arrest. Though He had all power to destroy those coming to do Him harm, He was submitted to His Father’s will and allowed their chains to shackle His hands and feet.

Gentleness is descriptive of His character that is produced in the lives of His disciples.

**Matthew 11:28-30 - “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”**

### Patience

This is what follows in the life of the one who possesses humility and gentleness. It speaks of being long-tempered and the ability to endure difficulty in life.

It is the opposite of worry and a quick temper. We often hurry through life without patience and forget that growth doesn’t happen overnight.

**James 5:10 - “As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”**

Consider God’s patient servants throughout biblical history:

- Noah was a preacher of righteousness for 120 years
- Abraham waited 100 years for Isaac
- Jeremiah was called to preach though no one would listen

**James 1:2-4 - “Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”**

### Forbearance

In order for unity to be a reality in the body of Christ, we must bear with one another in love. Forbearance is enduring through problems for love’s sake.

Forbearance is love that is willing to take abuse from others while continuing to love them in the process.

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

### Eagerness to Maintain Unity

The fifth virtue mentioned in the list is an eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**“Eager”** - *diligence and intentionality*

**“Maintain”** - *to preserve or carefully guard; present participle which means it is our constant concern*

Guarding the unity of the body is the responsibility of every member that makes up that body. If it is left unattended or taken for granted, it can quickly break down. The enemy would love nothing more than for unity in the body to be dissolved.

Although we are charged with maintaining it, unity itself is the work of the Spirit, not something that we ourselves produce.

How do we maintain it?

**A.W. Tozer** - *“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers [meeting] together, each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”*

We maintain and guard unity in the body through pursuing growth in Christ and keeping our eyes on Him. As long as self is at the center, and as long as our wants and preferences and rights are our chief concerns, there will never be unity.

## **2. Unity is MOTIVATED by the glory of God (4:4-6)**

*“There is one body and one Spirit--just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call--one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”*

To be a disciple is to be a member of the body of Christ. Being a member in Christ's body is not optional. It comes with the new birth. There is no solo discipleship!

The beauty of the body of Christ is that it is:

- multi-generational
- multi-ethnic
- multi-cultural

The gospel of Jesus Christ breaks down barriers and unites believers under the banner of the cross.

Scripture shows us how the early church was made up of both Jew and Gentile. This doesn't really register with us today, but in the first century it was a very big deal. Mentioning Jews and Gentiles in the same sentence meant that something unusual was happening in the church.

The Holy Spirit was blending both Jews and Gentiles together into one body. When the church was born and came into being, the Spirit of God began uniting a crowd of different people with different backgrounds into one body. The early church not only contained Jews and Gentiles, but it was made up of poor people and rich people, slave and free, upper class and lower class.

None of the old divisions mattered anymore. Where there was once division and hostility, the Holy Spirit brought unity.

The result of this unity brings great glory to God.

**John MacArthur** - *"There is only one body of believers, the church, which is composed of every saint who has trusted or will trust Christ as Savior and Lord. There is no denominational, geographical, ethnic, or racial body. There is no Gentile, Jewish, male, female, slave, or freeman body. There is only Christ's body, and the unity of that body is the heart of the book of Ephesians."*

There is one Spirit who indwells every member of the body. There is one hope of our calling as believers. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism.

This destroys the arguments for religious pluralism.

### **3. Unity is DEMONSTRATED through a diversity of gifts (4:7-10)**

*"But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it says, 'When He ascended on high He led a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men.' (In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that He had also*

*descended into the lower regions of the earth? He who descended is the One who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)”*

The point being made in these verses is that Jesus has given gifts to every member of His body.

Without exception, if you are a member of the body of Christ, you have been given a measure of grace whereby Jesus has gifted you so that you can be a blessing to others around you. Members growing and exercising their gifts is what builds up the body.

**1 Corinthians 12:4-27 - “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good...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. 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. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same**

**care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”**

Sometimes, you hear people make the argument that their failure to participate in the life of the church is not hurting anyone because there are plenty of others. This passage confronts that philosophy head on!

Unity relies on gentleness to guide us. Unity rests in God who grows us. Unity respects the grace that gifts us.

In conclusion, why is unity so essential to growth? Without it, growth cannot take place. You cannot grow in your relationship with God if you are not at the same time growing in your relationship with the body of Christ. Consider:

- Divine blessing is contingent upon unity

An illustration of this is seen in the home:

**1 Peter 3:7 - “Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayer may not be hindered.”**

A husband who is mistreating and taking advantage of his wife need not worry about his devotion life because God is not listening to him. If he is not seeking that which promotes unity in his home and reflects the relationship of Christ and His church, he is not on the same page with God.

This principle is also true of the church. I wonder how often God has desired to do a great work in the church, but in many ways He could not because the church couldn't get it together.

- Diligence is critical for unity

We must always strive to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Though unity is not produced by us, it must be preserved by us lest it be lost.

- Diversity is characteristic of unity

Unity is not uniformity, but rather it respects the differences of other believers in the family of faith. Every member is gifted, every member is unique, and every member is a precious part of the body of Christ.