

Message: Power to Preserve the Church's Unity and Peace

Text: Ephesians 3:14 - 4:6

Introduction

- A. Since moving to the South, I have learned that Thanksgiving weekend, Black Friday weekend, is also known as “rivalry weekend.” Whether or not you like football, you’d have to be living under a rock not to know that.
- B. Folks at TRB keep things in perspective and engage in good natured kidding, but rivalry in the history of the world began with sibling rivalry - Cain murdering his brother Abel - and has led to unspeakable hatred and human suffering ever since.
- C. Rivalry was alive and well when Jesus Christ had His apostle Paul write to the church at Ephesus and surrounding churches. Rivalry between Jews and Gentiles was always intense, and often deadly. But God had sent His divine Son into the world to redeem from the world of humanity by His blood a people for Himself, called to be ...
1. 1:4 a holy, blameless people who receive Christ as Lord, and as a result, receive forgiveness of their sins.
 2. 1:22,23 the body and bride of Christ for whom He will one day return to glorify.
 3. 2:15 a new humanity, comprised of Jew and Gentile who live in peace with one another
 4. 2:19 citizens of God’s eternal kingdom who pledge their allegiance to Christ as Lord
 5. 2:19 members of God’s family, loved by God and loving one another
 6. 2:21,22 a holy temple, a dwelling place for God in the Spirit
 7. 3:21 to be a church that glorifies God forever
- D. This is a privileged calling, a lofty calling, requiring we have no division, factions, among us. Frankly it is impossible for us to live up to this calling in our own power, as the Corinthian church discovered.
- 1 Corinthians 11:18 For, in the first place, **when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you;**
- E. But it is obvious from Paul’s words that their and our own human weakness is not to become an excuse for God’s people to be a peace-breaking, divisive, God-dishonoring people.
- Ephesians 4:1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, **implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,**² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,³ **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**
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- F. How can we, Christ’s church, live in the unity and harmony for which He died, a unity which brings God glory, a unity and harmony which He now commands from heaven?

I. Unity requires the power of Christ within us.

- A. It is because God has and continues to make the power of His Spirit available to us that He can make such a demand of us and expect us to joyfully, lovingly comply. Paul’s “Therefore” points back to what has just been said about the power of Christ in our inner person.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, **according to the power that works within us,**²¹ to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

4:1 **Therefore** I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called,

- B. The power that works within us is nothing less than God's power whereby He raised Christ from the dead, and exalted Him above all earthly and spiritual powers that tried to prevent Christ's resurrection and exaltation to the Father's right hand, a strength we are to continually seek for ourselves and one another.

Ephesians 1:19 and **what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe**, in accordance with **the working of the strength of His might**²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, **when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places**,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason **I bow my knees before the Father**...¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, **to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man**

II. 4:2a Unity requires God's power to walk humbly before God and one another.

Ephesians 4:2 **with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance** for one another in love,

- A. Notice how these 4 virtues are related. Pride produces harshness, impatience, intolerance.

1. Humility preserves the peace, diffuses rivalry, but pride, arrogance breaks the peace, stirring up fighting.

Proverbs 28:25 An arrogant man stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the LORD will prosper.

2. Gentleness is linked to humility and preserves peace, harshness breaks the peace, and devalues its objects.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

3. Patience is linked to humility, in that it doesn't require its own way/agenda to be uninterrupted. Impatience breaks the peace.

4. Tolerance, bearing with one another, promotes peace, in that we don't retaliate or push back - "I don't have to take that from you."

Proverbs 19:11 A man's discretion makes him **slow to anger**, and **it is his glory to overlook a transgression**.

- B. Christ is all of these things.

Matthew 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you and **learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart**, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS.

1 Timothy 1:16 Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, **Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience** as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.

- C. All of these qualities are the product of a faith/trust in the Lord that works through love.

III. 4:2b Unity requires God's power to love God and one another.

- A. Love gives birth to humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another

Ephesians 4:2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance **for one another in love**,

1 Corinthians 13:4 **Love is patient, love is kind** and is not jealous; **love does not brag and is not arrogant**,⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, **does not take into account a wrong suffered**,

B. Therefore, love is the perfect bond of unity, this love for which Paul has prayed believers be rooted and grounded in.

Colossians 3:14 Beyond all these things **put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.**

Ephesians 3:17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that **you, being rooted and grounded in love,**¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you **may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

IV. 4:3 Unity requires we work hard by God's power to preserve it.

Ephesians 4:3 **being diligent** (work hard) to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

A The unity of us who share Christ's Spirit is a costly gift from God, purchased at the expense of Christ's life.

Ephesians 2:14 For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,¹⁵ by **abolishing in His flesh** the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace,¹⁶ and might **reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross,** by it having put to death the enmity.

B. God's power in us does not relieve us from working hard but enables us to work hard for His pleasure.

Hebrews 13:20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord,²¹ **equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,** through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Psalms 105:4 **Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face continually.**

Zephaniah 2:3 **Seek the LORD,** all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; **Seek righteousness, seek humility.** Perhaps you will be hidden In the day of the LORD'S anger.

V. 4:4-6 God-empowered unity is rooted in the unity of our God.

Ephesians 4:4 *There is* one body and **one Spirit,** just as also you were called in one hope of your calling;⁵ **one Lord,** one faith, one baptism,⁶ **one God and Father** of all who is over all and through all and in all.

A. The members of the Trinity work in harmony - they do not work at cross purposes with one another for the glory of God in the church and in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us,²¹ **to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever.** Amen.

B. So also, those who have sincerely pledged their love and faith to the Lord Jesus Christ will not work at cross purposes with God's intention to sum up everything in Christ and for Christ to establish peace among all those for whom He died.

Conclusion

A. Thanksgiving weekend isn't a rivalry weekend just because of football, or because of competitive Black Friday shoppers. It is also a time when too many family gatherings turn into family fights. As one late night comedian joked, "Thanksgiving is a powerful reminder of why families only get together once or twice a year" (Jimmy Kimmel).

B. But this must not be the case in God's family, God's household, the church. By the power of God, and for the glory of God in the church and in Christ Jesus, seek to imitate the loving humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance of the humble Christ, who gave everything He had to reconcile us to God and to one another, creating peace. Isn't this why this Christmas season we celebrate His coming?

Ephesians 2:14 **For He Himself is our peace**, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall,¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that **in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace**,¹⁶ and **might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross**