

EPHESIANS - Ephesians 4:1-2a
Message 59
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INTRO: We are now in Ephesians 4. We have completed the doctrinal section of the letter which was chapters 1-3 and have entered the practical section which is chapters 4-6. And this practical section has to do with the walk of the believer. The walk of the Christian is the life of the Christian. As walking is one step at a time, so the Christian life is one step at a time.

Now one would think that the Christian life would start out difficult and then get easier and easier as life goes along. Looking back over my own Christian life, it started out wonderful. I had been under tremendous conviction, knowing I was on the way to hell. And when I surrendered to the Lord, as I have described my first while as a Christian the sky looked bluer and the grass looked greener.

But then the real life began to set in and I saw myself responsible to study the Bible and help others, and trouble began there. Maybe I have told you. I was burdened for the young people in the traditional church I was attending. I began to work with them and we did help a lot of young people. Many of them are still walking with the Lord. But trouble set in. One day I got a call from a restaurant to come pick up, I think it was fifty hamburgers, I had ordered. But I had not ordered any hamburgers. Although I didn't see it as such at the time, it was a form of persecution. Well, I offered to pay for those hamburgers but the restaurant didn't accept my offer.

Another time some person challenged me to meet him at a certain place about some biblical subject and I went but he never showed up. Another time, I was married by this time, I got a call of distress in the middle of the night. It was some guy in town who said he was ready to commit suicide. He said something like he was standing in the window of the hotel on the top floor and he said something like he needed help. And then he said in a very sad voice, "What should I do?" I was in a deep sleep and couldn't think clearly yet, but as soon as he asked, I said, "Jump!" It was amazing, there must have been a crowd there because as soon as I said that some people burst out laughing in the background, and I was able to go back to bed.

Well, even those early problems seem ever so small now. The Christian life is a walk. It is step by step and from place to new place. And in every place one needs to learn to live by faith in a new and unfamiliar way because one has never been to this place before.

And in this first section on the practical life of the believer Paul addresses unity in the local church. And Paul gives a number of keys and the ring of keys has another ring with two keys on it and Paul addresses those first. They were to walk in all lowliness and gentleness, or maybe better meekness. You might remember the word *tapainophrosunee*, lowliness of thinking. I think all one needs to get some lowliness of thinking is to get a real look at oneself. As long as we see somebody when we see ourselves lowliness of thinking has not arrived. When we get to see a little of how small and insignificant we are in the whole picture there is now some hope for lowliness of thinking. Nothing can reveal ourselves to us like the Word of God. When lowliness of thinking sets in meekness has a chance. And when lowliness of thinking and meekness enter, unity becomes a possibility in the church.

III. THE WORTHY WALK OF THE SAVED (4-6).

A. Walk Worthy Of Your Calling (4:1-16)

1. The call to unity (4:1-4:6)

b. The 'how' of unity cont'd

- With longsuffering

Well, we have looked at the 'what' of unity. It is to walk worthy of the calling with which we were called. And we are now in the process of looking at the how of unity in the local church. We have already seen that it requires lowliness of thinking and meekness. The next key to unity Paul will mention is to be longsuffering. So let me read verses 1-3 once more:

1 *I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are*

called,

- 2 *With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;*
- 3 *Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

The next word on our list here is longsuffering. Lowliness of thinking, the kind of thinking Christ had, prepares us for meekness and lowliness of thinking and meekness make longsuffering possible. It will be helpful to look at the original word which is *makrothumia*. The first part of that word means *long*. The second part is *thumos*. The word *thumos* has been translated as wrath 15 times, fierceness 2 times and indignation 1 time. We get a bit of the idea of this word now. The online Bible gives words like this for this word: passion, angry, heat, anger forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again. Second it says it is to glow, ardour, the wine of passion, inflaming wine (which either drives the drinker mad or kills him with its strength).

What is the idea of this word? There are several words for anger in the NT but *thumos* is one that shows an anger that sparks almost as soon as something goes wrong. You can be just as happy as can be one moment, and something undesirable happens and immediately spark hits gasoline and ignites and then is burned up almost as quickly. That is *thumos*.

But longsuffering takes long before it lights up. So it is called longsuffering instead of immediate hot flames. So we are close to the word patience here. Listen to Vine's dictionary. He says: "Longsuffering is that quality of self-restraint in the face of provocation which does not hastily retaliate or promptly punish; it is the opposite of anger, and is associated with mercy and is used of God, Ex. 34:6 (Sept.); Rom. 2:4; 1 Pet. 3:20. Patience

is the quality that does not surrender to circumstances or succumb under trial; it is the opposite of despondency and is associated with hope, 1 Thess. 1:3; it is not used of God."

Now all of this begins to give us a feel for this word *longsuffering*. Do you know people of whom we say that they have a short fuse? Let me explain what having a short fuse means. When I was young we had trouble with beavers damming up our creek and flooding our meadows so we couldn't hay them.

In those days we almost always had dynamite handy somewhere because we used it in the lumber business and in the bit of farming we did. And so we would watch our dad find the right place on the beaver dam and he would punch a hole with a steel bar into the dam. Then he would take a stick of dynamite and sometimes several. If he used more than one they were tied together. Then he would poke a small hole in one end of one. Then he would take a cap that would set the dynamite off and he would put it on the end of a fuse. And with the fuse, which was covered with tar, he would push the cap into the stick of dynamite.

And the crucial part was the length of the fuse. It depended how far you had to go for shelter. Well, by the time my dad was lighting a match we were lighting out. And then we would wait, and sometimes wait some more, and all of a sudden came this loud explosion. I won't say 'boom' too loudly because Georgia always jumps when I do that.

So with that illustration, what is a person like who has a short fuse? Well, when something bad happens you haven't got time to run and hide before he or she explodes. He or she, when something bad happens, can't count to ten before the spark hits the dynamite. The explosion comes almost immediately and somebody gets hurt. He or she

is not long-fused. The bad event hits the cap in the dynamite too soon.

Now you see, Paul is saying if you want unity in the church you need to learn to be long-fused. So now we have people who are lowly in thinking, they are meek in character, and long-fused. Not confused, but long-fused.

Some years ago when my wife and I ministered in Mexico, the senior pastor of the church where I was speaking said, "I always wonder why God sends certain people to a church." What he meant was they tax you almost beyond endurance. And I ask, could it be that they are there to minister a longer fuses to others? Well, longsuffering or longtempered is a key to church unity.

-bearing with one another in love

There is a fourth key to maintaining unity in the church. It is this: "...bearing with one another in love." What I find most helpful to understand this word to bear with one another is not how it is made up, but how it is used elsewhere. It is used 15 times in the NT and has been translated as to suffer 7 times, bear with 4 times, forbear 2 times, and endure 2 times. To suffer or bear with or forbear or endure others gives us some idea of the meaning of this word.

But let me take you to another references where this word is used that will help us to get a feel for this word. We go to Matthew 17. Jesus had been up on a mountain with three of His disciples. And while they were there, Moses and Elijah had come down from heaven and they spoke to Jesus about the death He was about to experience.

And when this was over they came back down and we pick up in verse 14:

14 *And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him,*

kneeling down to Him and saying,

15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.

16 "So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him."

17 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me."

Jesus said, "O faithless and perverse generation." You see, He suffered or put up with, or bore with them. So He said, "How long shall I be with you?" Do you feel like that sometimes with others? It sounds as if it was tiring for Jesus to be with people who never seem to get it. And then He said, "How long shall I bear with you?" There is our word. The picture is quite clear. This is how we need to learn to bear with one another, even though it is tiring.

Let me put it this way. There are some people you enjoy being with. You don't have to suffer them or bear with them or endure them. You find them refreshing. So whom do you have to suffer or bear with or endure? Well, maybe those that rub you the wrong way. Or those that say things you wish they wouldn't or ask questions about things you think are none of their business or any host of other things we don't enjoy.

You see, when you have a church, you have called out ones. One person or one family does not make a church. You must have people. And as soon as you have more than one there is every potential for problems. One doesn't dress the way you like. It rubs you the wrong way. One has mannerism that just irk you. One doesn't train their children the way you think they should. There are very many dimensions to relationships and

we all have our own set of idiosyncrasies. In German we might say, "Wie han aula onze ajene Ziten."

And Paul exhorts here that we learn to suffer or bear or forbear one another. Again, we are not talking about sin. Sin needs to be dealt with. I feel deeply for those who wish they could go to church, but they have no place they feel they can fellowship without feeling they are endorsing that which they do not think is right. And so they may end up in a house church and maybe alone. There are many like that today. I am not talking about those who are looking for a perfect church. I am talking about genuine concerned Christians.

Let me insert here to show us where I think we are in church life in America and maybe the world. We have studied through the seven churches of Asia. I am in agreement with many other premillennialists who think these seven churches show us the seven ages of the Church age. Somebody tell me the name of the seventh church of Revelation 2-3? Laodicea. Does anybody remember what Laodicea means? We might call it the democratic church. It is a people-rule church. And this church is the lukewarm church. And the Lord says that unless they repent He will vomit them out. He said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." Where is He? Outside! I believe what this church represents is a church that is a church in name only. The people profess Christianity but for the most part they are not saved. They might say all the right things but the Lord is left standing outside.

And many modern churches are altogether like that, or they are almost there or they are on the way there. And for truly born again people to identify with such a church goes against them to such an extent that sometimes they feel they are compromising their convictions to such an extent they can no longer attend. And now they

are missing one of the most crucial elements God wants to use to conform them to the image of Christ, and that is interacting with other Christians who may help extend their fuse. And these we have to learn to suffer, or put up with, or forbear in order to keep the unity of the church. And in the midst of becoming lowly in thinking, and meek and longsuffering, and bearing with one another God is conforming us to the image of Christ.

But notice last now in this phrase that we are to bear with one another in love. Now I need not tell you that love here is agapee love. Every time I come to this word 'love' I suffer for an understanding of what it means. Some years ago my brother-in-law Steve sent me a definition he wrote up. Listen to it:

Love is the total and complete selfless act of a person which concerns itself solely for the actual betterment and well-being of another person or persons, for the best possible physical and spiritual outcome; and manifests itself in patience, humility, discipline and truth.

I am convinced that agapee love is as rooted in the mental capacities of man as we usually think it is rooted in the emotions. Agapee love is not based on emotions. Listen to these words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37: "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' Now tell me what the Bible means when it uses the word 'heart' like this? Yes, the mind. I explained to you not too long ago what the word 'mind' at the end of this verse speaks of. The word translated *mind* here is *dianoia*. I believe it means the thoughts we pull out of the storage part of the mind, that is where the word '*noia*' comes from, and then thinking through such stored information. A huge part of our lives is spent there. This affects about every part of our lives.

So love is based in our mental capacities not our emotions. So if we bear with one another in love, it means what we do is thought through. You see, if we truly love we might tell someone things that need correction as well as possibly good things we see and recognize. And according to the definition from my brother-in-law that I gave, what we say or do would come out of desire for the betterment and well-being of the person we are talking to. This requires honesty whether what we have to say is negative or positive. So Paul says that we should bear with one another in love.

And so before we leave this point let me ask, do we ever think to pray for the one we find ourselves having to suffer or forbear or bear with? Do we pray, "Oh Lord, so and so does some things, I don't think he or she realizes what it is. Would you be gracious Lord and let them get to see it?" Or, "Lord, work in me so that I might be gracious with so and so." Or, "Lord I have a problem. And this person just irks me. Would you work in me to give me strength to graciously endure this?" And then maybe sometimes it falls to us to mention something to another in love. Oh, these things are very hard but we are to bear with one another in love.

-endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit

Well, there is yet one more key Paul gives to help to build church unity. And so for the last key to unity in the church, and maybe a way of summing it all up, Paul says, "...endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit."

Now the first question we must answer is what spirit are we talking about? The NKJV capitalizes the word Spirit, indicating they feel it refers to the Holy Spirit, and I think most would probably agree with that.

But I think it is worthy of further note that man is made up of

three major parts; body, soul and spirit. Let me just share how I see the makeup of man. From the physical side, we have five vehicles through which information comes to us. These are the five senses. This is the only way information comes to us as persons from the physical world. The information that comes is processed in our minds and we make decisions accordingly.

So let us say it is -40 degrees outside as we've had it here for the last while. You are sitting inside and you smell smoke. Red flags are raised immediately. Then you see a whiff of smoke and now panic sets in. Two of your five senses have let in a little information and it is enough to put you in panic mode. Well, we have five such sensors.

But sometimes we hear of a sixth sense. Well, there is no sixth sense from the physical aspect of man, but there is another source of information that very few are aware of. Let me explain it from the picture of the tabernacle of the OT. I believe it serves as an illustration of the makeup of a person. There is the physical structure which speaks of our body. Then there is the holy place, which speaks of our soul. And last there is the holy of holies which speaks of our spirit. And in the physical structure there are five pillars and a veil that make the doorway. I believe they picture the five senses. If you study this building, the number five is stamped all around the building.

Now if you enter the building, between the holy place and the most holy place there are four pillars and a veil that make a second doorway. But it does not enter from the outside like the first doorway. It is entered from the inside.

Now I am not going to take time to explain all this, but I believe those four pillars speak of four ways information enters us through the spirit. I

believe this is what is spoken of when we speak of a sixth sense. It is very obvious that information enters us that comes by some other means than the five senses so we call it a sixth sense.

Let me just briefly give the four areas in which spiritual information can enter us and again, I do not want to take too much time. But in various situations animal spirits may send a message. This is especially apparent among native people. Then we pick up a spirit from certain people. It may put us on edge or relax us. Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:11. It says, "For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God."

That verse mentions the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. So the Holy Spirit communicates with us through our spirit. Romans 8:16 says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." We may sense promptings from the Holy Spirit not to do or say certain things, or we may come under conviction for some thing we did wrong. That is a communication by the Holy Spirit through our spirit to us. And here, in this way, keeping the unity of the Spirit would require obeying the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

And then, there is one more kind of spirit that can communicate with us and that is the evil spirit. And evil spirits can wreak all kinds of havoc among Christians. If anyone is living in sin, such a person is dynamite to church unity. Anyone desiring a position or power or prestige in a church setting is dynamite to unity. Here evil spirits have access to work disunity. No doubt, 'Divide and conquer' is something the devil uses over and over.

I think that one of the large areas of ignorance among Christians is the ignorance of the

communication of evil spirits to us through our spirit. And if we will keep the unity of the Holy Spirit we need to learn to know the workings of evil spirits. It is very easy to aid the work of the devil in a church if one does not recognize the working of evil spirits. Beyond all doubt to maintain the unity of the Spirit it is helpful to have at least some understanding of the spirit part of man.

Now we notice last that this unity of the Spirit is to take place in the bond of piece. This unity is bound together with the band which is peace. Oh to have peace in the church.

I used to load lumber trucks. I don't remember how many bundles of lumber we put on but the trucks had a long trailer and we filled it up with stacks of lumber. And then when the loading was done the truck driver would get out long chains and throw two over each stack of bundles and then he would take a chain tightner and cinch the bundles down until he could no longer tighten it down any more. Then he would take an extension bar, put it on the handle of the chain tightener and you would think the chains would break. And when he was done those chains were as stiff as an iron rod. And the chains were the bond that held the load securely in place. Today they have better material to cinch a load down. And I have seen a truck like that in the ditch and that which bound the load together let go and there was lumber all over the place.

When there is not lowliness of thinking and meekness and longsuffering; and when there is not a bearing with one another and an endeavoring to keep the unity in the bond of peace, then members are left spread all over. One member in whom Satan has one area to work in can cause the bond of peace to break.

I have sat in meetings for many, many years. The older I get the

more difficult I find meetings and it is because of divisiveness. Things that gender to division or a lack of peace always want to enter. Some things are unavoidable and they have to be dealt with. There was a time when that was not so hard for me but now I am tired and oh how refreshing to have meetings that have unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.

Now notice that we are to endeavor to keep the unity in the bond of peace. The idea in the word 'endeavor' is to make haste or to exert oneself. It takes effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit. It does not happen by itself.

So to conclude on the how of this unity, Paul has come alongside the Ephesians to encourage them to seek to maintain unity in the church. He began with an encouragement to lowliness of thinking. Then for the members to be meek and longsuffering. They needed to learn to bear with one another, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of piece.

c. Why

Well, we have now looked at the what of Christian unity. It is to have a walk worthy of the calling with which we are called. We have looked at the 'how' of Christian unity. It is to be lowly in thinking and meek. It is to be longsuffering and bearing with one another in love. It is to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

It is very easy to let some thinking enter through our own spirit by some evil spirit. And our thinking can be infected and we may not recognize what is happening and that infection may creep through our souls. It may come from those who are complaining about some aspect of the church. It may be a member or someone from outside the church. It is not that one cannot disagree with what the church is doing but to infect somebody else's thinking about another

member can happen ever so easily and we do not recognize that growing within us is a spiritual infection. And the bond of peace is broken. So Paul instructs us on how to keep the unity of the Spirit.

And now that we have looked at the 'what' and the 'how' we now want to look at the 'why'. As I interpret these verses, verses 4-6 give us the 'why' of church unity. We begin by reading verses 4-6. Paul says:

- 4 *There is one body and one Spirit, just as 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 above all, and through all, and in you all.*

So we begin with the first reason Paul gives. It is because:

-There is one body

Why should unity prevail in the local church? Well, there is only one body. Now there are two aspects to the doctrine of the Church. We have mentioned that the unity the Ephesians were called to maintain was unity in their local church. But when Paul says there is one body, and he might say, there is only one body, it speaks of the universal church. I think Paul is arguing here from the greater to the lesser. If the universal Church is one body, the local church is a part of it and so as you don't cut members off a body to make something else, so there should be unity in the local church.

The universal church is made up of all truly born again believers of the Church age, no matter which denomination or which country they come from. So the first illustration Paul gives of unity in the church is by likening it to a body. Just as the universal church is made up of members so each local church is made up of

various members.

Let me just mention something here that we will note more later.

But of the body, the head is the most crucial part with regard to the functioning of the body.

Ephesians 1:22 says, "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church..."

Then in 4:15 Paul says, "...but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ."

And last in Ephesians he says in 5:23, "For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body." So Jesus Christ is the head of the universal Church.

Well we go to 1 Corinthians 12 where Paul deals with this subject more thoroughly. There is no greater chapter in the Bible on this subject than this chapter. Now in Ephesians Paul begins with the illustration of the body and then he moves on to say there is only one Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 he will speak first about the Holy Spirit's part in the Church and then he will use the illustration of the body. In this chapter Paul is speaking to the Corinthians, a specific local church. We'll begin in verse 12:

12 *For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.*

Why is unity important in the church? Paul illustrates this by saying there is one body. There are not two or three bodies in one church or in the world. So Paul says in verse 13:

13 *For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves*

or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

14 *For in fact the body is not one member but many.*

15 *If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?*

16 *And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body?*

17 *If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?*

I think we have no trouble understanding that vivid illustration of the church as a body. It is abortionists and murderers that cut limb from limb and separate the members of the body. That is what it is like to divide up the church. So when Paul wants to tell us why there should be unity in the church the first thing he says is that there is one body.

We go on to verse 18:

18 *But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.*

This is an important verse. God has set the members of the body as it pleased Him. The thumb did not decide where it wanted to be and so it is with all the members of the body. God put the body together in the way that pleased Him. So Paul goes on to show what it would be like if all the members were the same member. Verse 19:

19 *And if they were all one member, where would the body be?*

20 *But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.*

Over the years various clichés have been developed like *unity in diversity*. Most certainly that is true in the church. Different members have different

functions, so there is diversity. In our physical bodies, there is diversity. Yet there is only one body. So it is to be in the church.

But almost, if not all these clichés can be taken too support that which is not biblical. So by using these kinds of sayings we may end up allowing such things as rock music and various other harmful practices. And we say there must be unity in diversity.

Verse 21:

21 *And 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."*

22 *No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary.*

Have you ever considered toes? Not very handsome little creatures are they? I suppose that is why women paint the nails. But lose a toe, especially the big one, and all of a sudden you realize all your life you have taken this toe for granted. So Paul says in verse 23:

23 *And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty,*

24 *but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it,*

25 *that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another.*

The word schism comes from the word schidzo, for which the Onlinebible suggests such words as to cleave, cleave asunder, rend, to divide by rending, to split into factions, be divided. God has put

the body into such an order as He has that there should be no division. That is why the Church is likened to the body.

Verse 26:

26 *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

27 *Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

Now what Paul notes here is that in our physical bodies God has placed the members in the way that it pleased Him. We can see the wisdom. You would not want a thumb growing out of your wrist, or a toe out of your knees. They have a specific place. Furthermore he says the eye can't say to the hand, "I have no need of you."

Now here in 1 Corinthians Paul is dealing with spiritual gifts. And Paul shows that each member has a specific place. I often observe this in our local church meetings and how this works out.

So Paul argues that there should be unity in the local church because there is but one body.

CONCL: So we conclude for this morning. We have now looked at the what. It is to have a walk worthy of the calling with which we are called. We have looked at the how of unity. It is to have to walk in lowliness of thinking. It is to think like Christ thought. It is to walk in meekness. It is to exercise restraint when we have the wherewithal to put somebody in their place. Then it is to walk with longsuffering. We need to extend our fuses so we don't blow as soon as something goes wrong. And then it is to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We have begun to look at the 'why' of unity. Paul gives a whole list of reasons, the first being that there is only one body. You don't divide up a body and you have an arm over there and an eye here, and some toes in another place. They all have a place and God has chosen that place for them.

