

The House of Unity

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I was just sitting there thinking about Christ and all that we have learned of him in Ephesians and this visit again in the book of Ephesians has been a blessing and a help to my life. I thought, you know, it's a little bit like cheating because this is my work but it blesses me. Now, don't misunderstand me, there is a weariness to the whole thing but it is a blessing to meditate on the text and study the text and see the rich truths come out and I hope it is to.

Again, we often in the Anchored in Truth office and in my particular office, I counsel with pastors and encourage pastors and often Brother Steve and sometimes an elder or two, I myself sometimes get on an airplane, even, and go to a place to deal with conflict and difficulty in a church plant or maybe a sister church or a partner church, so the idea of disunity and disharmony in congregations, I say the idea, let's say the reality of it is there. It's common. It's almost uncommon to hear of a church that walks in true spiritual unity, but probably the last thing a pastor should do if he takes over an existing congregation, is preach on or appeal to unity. The last thing he probably should do is to preach on or appeal to unity. What did Jesus do when he was here? Jesus hit the earth. He lived to be about 30. He started his ministry and immediately he tried to bring all the factions and divisions of Israel and Judaism together and get them all in unity, right? Oh Lord, help. Jesus waltzed in there with a flamethrower and started war. As a matter of fact he said, "I didn't come to bring peace, I came to bring a sword."

Now strap that onto your unity banner. Is that not the truth? When God sent Amos, we are preaching through Amos on Sunday morning, God sends Amos up to Bethel, up to Samaria in the northern kingdom and he said, "Come on, let's all get together. Let's all be unified." Is that what he did? No. Strong, brazen, bold, convicting, sometimes sarcastic, cutting rebuke. He built divisions and problems, he didn't build unity. Do you know why? Are you listening? There is only one true unity, that's the unity of the Spirit based on truth, and when you are dealing with the people who know not spiritual new birth, most of them haven't experienced spiritual new birth, they may have had experience raising their hand in a meeting when they were a child, they may have experienced walking down an aisle, they may have experienced repeating a prayer to someone, they may have experienced going through the baptismal waters, they may have experienced being christened as a baby or sprinkled as a baby and going through the sacraments administered by some priests, they may have experienced a law of things, but if they

haven't experienced spiritual rebirth, being born again, they cannot have unity as God defines unity. By the way, God's definition is the only definition.

Now you have to live in the world, whether it is school, the ball team, your work environment, and there is a type of unity you can have there around your purposes and that's fully righteous and good. God knows we live in the world, he understands that, but unity as Christians are to know it, the true and high unity of Christianity, is only possible when the large percentage of the people in the congregation are spiritually reborn. And that's why I often say what most pastors try to do when they try to get everybody together is not unity of the spirit, it's almost always toleration of the flesh. They end up appeasing a few powerbrokers, a few domineering women, so that they can keep them happy and so they won't cause factions and they call that, "Look at our unity." You don't have unity, you've just built idolatry in your church. Those people are the new idols. They are getting their way and they are trouble makers and they are unspiritual. Can I get a big amen on this Sunday night? This is true stuff. This is Baptist life. You know, the Baptist way is mob rule. You have a business meeting and whichever faction gets the biggest mob, they get to rule. Amen. I thank God that somehow, and I mean this with all my heart, somehow an abundance of grace, he's let us walk in a good strong multi-year experience of what I call true spiritual unity, what the Bible calls true spiritual unity.

But the last thing a pastor needs to do is to harp on unity. What he needs to do is get in that pulpit and take a book like Ephesians, Ephesians 1:1, and begin exegeting that text with Spirit-empowered preaching of the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ until God through his Gospel and by his Spirit, regenerates and saves enough of that congregation that they can now have true unity. You don't get to the unity verses in chapter 4 until you come through chapters 1, 2 and 3. Are you hearing me? So you can just forget all of this clever creed, go to all the seminars you want, go to all the conferences you want, read all the books you want, brothers, I'm telling you there must be the preaching of the Gospel that brings brokenness and humility and a consecration to God and then those people can begin to enjoy unity.

Now, you can exhort those people about unity. You can train them about unity. You can instruct them, but you can't make a hog into a kitty cat or a racehorse. It's just a different creature and that's the way a Baptist or an evangelical or anybody else is until they are really born of the Spirit. They do not have the capacity to do what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 4 and today we are in verses 2 and 3. I'll read verse 1 to get the flow of the context. I call this "The House of Unity." So Paul begins this specific practical application part after he has laid this great doctrinal foundation and he says,

1 Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you [you could say, beg you] to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, [here it is] 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.

Now having been raised from the depths of sin and misery and made the sons of God and therefore exalted to an inconceivable elevation of dignity, Paul says now this must produce something in your life. You have experienced the glories of the great doctrinal truths of salvation, sovereign grace salvation that has been so wonderfully laid out. The problem is some of you don't listen well and so when I get to chapter 4 and I'm realizing afresh you've got to get into chapter 1 and 2 or 4 is worthless. That's why expository preaching must be the mainstay of the pulpit. If you don't get sovereign grace, you can't get chapter 4. You can't do it. So maybe the Spirit of God will enable you to go back to all the glories of chapters 1 and 2 and all that God did for us in Christ Jesus that takes us to see afresh the depths of our sin and misery, our wretchedness before this holy God, but the unfathomable love he has shown us in his Son Jesus Christ and has cleansed us and made us right with him, given us peace with God when we only deserve the full wrath of God, and in that condition now, having wrestled through that, having been changed in our hearts by this Gospel and the truths of it, now Paul says, "Walk in humility. Walk in gentleness with one another. Walk being patient with each other. Walk in tolerance with one another because now you are capable of doing it now that the Gospel has crushed you and changed you. You are a different kind of people now."

Where these things are not experienced, where ongoingly a congregation doesn't show humility, ongoingly, is that a word? It works, though. It's theologically good. Ongoingly you have humility. Ongoingly you have gentleness. Ongoingly you have patience. Ongoingly you have tolerance. Or if you have the clear absence of those, one could argue or conclude the true Gospel change hasn't happened in many of the hearts of those people.

Now, boy it really grieves me, boy it gets up my dander a little bit when I see some of these good men of God, good women of God in some cases, who keep bowing down and rolling over and being walked on by flesh, self-consumed, power and control monsters in these congregations and the real spiritual men and women of God are thinking and their purpose is right, they're thinking, "No, I'm supposed to be humble. I'm supposed to be gentle. I'm supposed to not think of myself so I'll just let them have their way in the church." But the problem is they are not qualified to have their way in the church. They don't hold an office, or at least they don't qualify for any office in the church to have their way, and they are ruining the church into making it their little kingdom instead of Christ's kingdom. That's why Jesus took the whip and ran into the temple and literally whipped those men and drove them out and turned the tables over, because sometimes you don't go to church to keep unity, sometimes you go to church to clean house.

But to a people who has been – and I love the phrase – Gospel humbled, a people who have been broken about their sin, a people who are just, how should I say, enthralled with maybe, the truth of saving grace and the death of the Savior for them, then they can stand on these four structural pillars in the house of unity. You know, a house has got to have a structure. Well, the four structural pillars are there in verse 2: humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and doing all of this in love.

Now once again, the foundation has got to be right. You can go and preach unto you can't talk any longer about, "Oh, be humble. Oh, be patient. Oh, be full of meekness and gentleness. Oh, be tolerant." It's not going to do any good unless the foundation is there. What is the foundation? True salvation. A true born again experience. A true humbled heart before the Christ and before his cross. Then you can build on these things. So the foundation has got to be there. The great doctrines of chapters 1 and 2 have got to be there but, listen, the doctrine of the Gospel and the doctrine of the new birth and the doctrine of conversion, however you want to word it, has to be understood to a degree. I'm not saying that you know everything about it but it has to be understood at least in its basic concepts and it has to be experienced. Did you hear that?

I mean, you can study and be an intellectual person and articulate with great detail all the great glorious truths of sovereign grace salvation, but you can be arrogant and proud and fleshly about that too. You must understand enough of it and have experienced the reality of it. I understand I can articulate to you much about the great doctrine of universal sinfulness of man, I can articulate to you much about the great doctrine of the total depravity of all men before this holy God, I can articulate to you much about the great glory of God in casting his this unmerited favor toward wretched sinners who are in every way offensive to him and sending not an angel and not a prophet but his own Son to grievously take their place at the bar of judgment which was God's altar, the only altar, by the way, that has ever truly existed and that's Mount Calvary, that's the altar of God, that's where the sacrifice was made, that's where my sin was atoned, that's where my redemption was bought. He was buried. He rose for my justification. He rose up into heaven. He intercedes for me in heaven. I can articulate to you for hours biblical truth about those things but the question is how you experience the reality of it.

And I hope most of you are saying, "Well, yes, but not enough." That's good. If you think, "No, I am full done." No you haven't. You and I both need to be humbled again under it. We need to be broken again about it. We need to be baptized with the fresh anointing of gratitude for it. Amen? And that's why the church has to have continual continual continual exegetical Gospel preaching because the Gospel isn't just to get you to the moment of justification, that's wonderful, the Gospel is to keep you walking in sanctification and that's what Paul is talking about here. He said, "Now I've given you the great foundation, those great doctrines, and you have to understand it and experience it."

Let me give you a side note here. This is what separates us from all the pagan, superstitious, nonsense beliefs that have been around since man fell in the garden of Eden. And a lot of the teachings in a lot of those circles is that there is somehow if you're just in the right environment, if you're in the right setting, the Spirit just kind of emanates into you. "Here he comes." And it blesses you or it may curse you. You know, you can get accursed if you have the wrong little idol or something, it can bring a curse, but just some sort of osmosis that happens in this setting. Christian doctrine is not like that. You don't come into this room and kick out your understanding and somehow get a blessing because others around you are in the Spirit. That's superstitious. That's nonsense. We don't believe in having a certain good luck charm or somebody has a certain experience

and that gives me a blessing or it's good karma and all this other nonsense. The Catholic Church has made untold millions of dollars and controlled untold millions of people with this kind of superstitious nonsense. The Catholic Church has what they call relics. They have just items and things like they'll have a little piece of cloth that has a pope's blood on it from 200 years ago or whatever, and they will bring this stuff around, especially in Third World countries, and if you can get close to that relic, there is an emanating power that comes out of it in blessings. They've even got some girl, I think more than one, but they've got some lady entombed in a tomb. She looks awful. She's not there, it's just her body but there it is. And they will pass that, they will send that body, they will send that courts around the world and, bless their hearts, people who have been taught the ridiculous blasphemous errors of superstitious Catholic doctrine will walk by there thinking they will get some kind of emanation from that.

Christianity is radically opposite of that. Christianity says it's based on truth you must grasp in the mind that the Spirit uses to change the heart and the mind. You have to understand. That's why in the Old Testament, was it Ezra or Nehemiah? I always get that confused where Ezra was standing up to speak the law and everybody could come who was able to listen with understanding because there is no power that comes into your babies because they sit in the worship service. They have to be able to understand with the mind at least the basic truths and the Spirit uses that understanding. Don't you love Christianity? It's so wise and it is so spiritual. It might be because it's true. Amen? And then some of our charismatic friends, I love our charismatic friends and I thank God for many of them and I think they get off base, some more than others, but some of our charismatic friends that way off base that if you go to a certain meeting with a certain guy there is an anointing there and he can just kind of, poof, and all of you get it.

It's just foolish superstition is all it is, but our flesh wants something like that but it comes through you have to understand. Why do you think God took the time, just a word about prayer here, why do you think God spent the time to give us all this truth and all this understanding? There is sometimes an idolatry of prayer. What I mean by that, "I spent all this time in prayer. I spent all this time in prayer." Well, maybe. Do what this book says. Some of us might be like Joshua when he was worried about the power departing from Israel and God said, "Joshua, Achan has taken some of the spoils of the war against the word of God and until you get that fixed, you can pray all you want, God is not going to do anything. Do what the word says." I'm not discouraging prayer but don't hide in your prayer closet from obeying what the word says. I know pastors that get in their prayer closet and pray pray pray pray but they don't faithfully preach and implement what the book says in their churches. Well, they can keep praying but nothing is going to happen. There has got to be prayerful walking in the truth. It's both/and, not one or the other, of course.

Anyway, we're talking about the foundation of sound doctrine. I've chased a couple of rabbits but I think I caught them so that's all right. The foundation of sound doctrine. If that's true in people's hearts, if they have understood it to a degree and experienced it, then you can begin to build these pillars.

Let's notice first well, let's talk about the pillar of humility. That's what he talks about in verse 2 there, "with all humility." Someone said humility is not looking down on ourselves, it's forgetting ourselves. I think there is some good in that but if I'm going to have a biblical understanding of myself, there is a looking down on myself that can be righteous and good because the Bible says very bad things about me, naturally speaking. I am a wretched man, Isaiah said before the holiness of God. Wretched man. He said, "I've got unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips." He was looking down on himself but it was a righteous and good looking down on himself. But it's recognizing the value and the worth of the other person. Humility.

Now, it never means you agree with abject error or wickedness. That's not true humility but I think it means on the things that don't matter, the things that are outside of clear scriptural injunction, a humble person is just striving to walk and saying, "Well, do you know what? This is a nonessential. They value it that way, I see it another way, I'm going to be humble. They can have it their way." Biblical humility. Being conscious of our own weakness and guilt and that's what the Gospel does. You see, the Gospel, the Spirit uses the Gospel to make us continually aware of our weakness and guilt before God and, therefore, consequently we are desirous to be unnoticed and we are desirous to be unpraised. So this humility, biblically speaking, is the exact opposite of self-conceit or self-exaltation or setting ourselves up to attract the honor which comes from men. Romans 12:16 reminds us, "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not be haughty in mind but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation." I think what's interesting, this is a Greek church in a Greek city, Ephesus, and in the ancient Greek culture, the idea of humility was a derogatory thing. It was always a negative thing. And again, I don't mean to keep picking on our President but I think he would sort of be in that camp, that you can't ever say you are wrong, you can't ever ask for forgiveness, that's a weakness. Well, he is missing the boat completely in that viewpoint.

So this was a despised condition, never an admirable quality in this culture so this is really hitting home. Can you imagine the men in the church at Ephesus hearing these things. "Yeah. Wow. That's really different." Jesus Christ, of course, gives all truth its true definition and when we see our Lord Jesus Christ in his human form on the earth never sinning but yet the Bible says he emptied himself. He prayed in the garden, "Father, not my will but thy will be done. What's pleasing to you. I'm forgetting myself to put first what you put first." This is an essential pillar in the house of unity. Stott said that pride lurks behind all discord. Let me say that again: pride lurks behind all discord. You find a discordant or a factious spirit in the church, there is a proud spirit in somebody. It's always the case. John MacArthur says that every church squabble or dispute is about power and control. He said, "I don't care what they say." He said, "You get behind it all and you'll find power and control issues almost every single time."

He gives this illustration and this might get a little close to home, of a lady's Sunday school class and the janitor comes through and cleans that class and he sets the chairs up and the lady who teaches that class comes back through after that and she rearranges them in the way that she wants them. She's got control in that classroom, you see. Now,

that's not a wickedness but that's just the way we are geared and that's the way we function sometimes.

Pride lurks behind all discord and the greatest single secret of unity is humility, but who is capable of true humility? Only a Spirit-broken, Spirit-reborn true saint of God. That's why you've got chapters 1 and 2 first. It's got to be there.

Well, the essential pillar in the house of unity of humility. Now, the second essential pillar in the house of humility is gentleness, or you could translate it meekness. Meekness. Let me ask you a question: is meekness best pictured by a sickly horse that is not even able to stand but is sweet to pet and stroke? Or is meekness better pictured by a wild stallion full of power and strength, unbroken and unrestrained? Well, actually it's neither one. Meekness is great power but power always under control. Meekness is not synonymous with weakness. It never has been, it never will be. The meekest person who ever walked the earth was Jesus Christ and he is the mightiest man who ever walked the earth, and at times he exhibited his manhood. What bold courage to go into the Pharisees' homes and just boldly and publicly rebuke them for the wickedness. He was manly. He was manly. I like that about our Savior, amen? I'm going to tell you, this nonsense that makes Jesus out to be some effeminate weak guy is a radical departure from the truth of Scripture. He was a manly man but he was meek also. In meekness he could differ, in meekness he could give his life for those unworthy. He was the definition of meekness.

Meekness is strength fully surrendered to God's control. The strong personality who is nevertheless master of himself and the servant of others. I like that phrase. You can maybe be a strong personality but you want to strive to be a master of yourself and a servant of others. Pastors must strive to walk in meekness because we have a powerful position. One of our church members, he is here tonight, he may remember that as he helped me greatly early in my ministry when I was probably too much like Donald Trump. I may still be a little bit like that but he said, "You wield a big sword up there and you need to remember that." Boy, I thought about that and do you know what? He was right and I need to remember that. God gives pastors a power and an authority, especially in a church like you where based on biblical truth, you do what the Scripture says. You honor your pastor. You hold him in high esteem. So I need to be strong where I need to be strong but I need to master myself and only be biblical in what I'm strong about, not what I personally feel strongly about. By the way, God has answered a lot of your prayers because God has shifted me away from things that I used to be real strong on, onto things that he says I need to be strong on. That's been a growing process in my own life but I hope you too are growing in meekness. I don't think I've gotten there yet, by the way, but I am in the process and I want you to be in it with me and I'm convinced that you are.

True meekness is the absence of the disposition to assert personal rights. It's the opposite of self-assertion or rudeness or harshness. It's power but always power under control. In Matthew 11:29 Jesus said of himself, "Take My yoke upon you," and he says, "and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." And the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 10:1 says, "Now I, Paul, myself urge you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ--I who am meek when face to face with you, but bold

toward you when absent!" So it's the disposition of mind which enables us to bear without irritation or resentment the faults and injuries of others. Essential pillar in the house of unity, meekness.

So we have the pillar of humility and the pillar of meekness, now thirdly, the pillar of patience, and these do overlap because if you have one, you have the other and they always go together. He says with all humility and gentleness and patience. You might call this the suppression of anger. Suffering long. It's the way Christ lived. He suffered long under the oppression of this world that he walked through that was godless and sinful. Patience has the idea of perseverance in it. It means you never give up in your walk. And by the way, this patience means you never give up on a brother and sister in Christ. Sometimes a brother or sister in Christ is a little odd, a little strange, a little different, a little difficult, they get on your nerves, but you are to have a capacity in you because of the Gospel that has changed you and humbled you and you know how God has had patience with you and so you have patience with them and you don't give up on them. Now, this is not talking about you don't do church discipline when there is a brazen walk of lack of repentance and involvement in sin. Of course you would have to separate fellowship, the Bible requires that. I'm talking about when there is a brother or sister who is struggling and repenting and trying to grow and learn, you have patience with them.

You see, God has different kinds of sheep and that difficult sheep in your small group is not there because they need to grow, they are there because you need to grow. Amen. They are not there because they need to grow so much as they are there because you need to grow. That's why God gave you me as your preaching pastor, because you need to grow and you need to put up with me and learn to love me anyway. I know I'm very lovable but my wife might debate that at times. But the fact is we don't give up on each other.

And I've told you a thousand times when preaching about how we are to admonish and correct each other in love, we are always to do that with compassion and with humility, and we might ought to add, and with patience, with patience toward one another. And by the way, you haven't arrived. We are not a perfect church but I see these things functioning in this church and it is such a blessing. Heaven help us, after 37 years of pastoring, you should be seeing some of this stuff or you are a colossal failure. And we need to pray for pastors because, I'm telling you, there are far too many, they are good brothers and I love them, but they are skipping over this step in the foundation of getting people truly saved and then trying to get them to get along with each other, and they end up being expert corrallers of goats and difficult sheep. They are just corralling and trying to get those people together.

I could call a few names but I see some of our businessmen out there and I've known, you know, it's funny I've known a lot of our business guys when they started in business. Some of them actually came to me to talk to me about how they could get money to start their companies. That's funny. That's funny but that's just where they were and we prayed together and do you know what? They got their money and a lot of them have done good and God has blessed them but, you know, also I hear the reports. People get hired and

people get fired. People get hired and people get fired. Do you know why? Because they can't tolerate somebody ruining their company and they are doing the right thing. I mean, in a business you can't have the kind of same patience we have in Christianity. You ought to have some but it's a different kind of patience because you have an obligation to all those other people you are helping feed their families and if you let one or two ruin your company, you are hurting a lot of people. So there are some other aspects here when you take this out in the world. We are not talking about the world in here, though, we're talking about the body of Christ and in the body of Christ we need that spirit, that pillar of patience.

When Paul wrote to the Colossians, he reiterated this. Colossians 3:12, "So, as those who have been chosen of God," notice that's first, that's the foundation, you are the elect of God, the chosen of God not because you merited it but because God is just gracious to the unlovely and the unholy. "So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion," in other words, it's in there but sometimes you've got to work to get it on and walk in it. "Put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." If you're a child of God, it's in there. It's in there but sometimes you need to get it back out and put it back on. Are you hearing me, church? If God saved you, it's in there. You need to wear it, though.

Well, the pillar in the house of unity, the pillar of humility, the pillar of meekness, gentleness, the pillar of patience, and then lastly, the pillar of tolerance. Again, it ties in closely but it's a separate word here. Verse 2, "with all humility and gentleness with patience showing tolerance for one another in love." It relates to the trials we have as a result of unloving conduct. It is a trial when we are not loved and cared for and considered perhaps by a brother and sister in Christ the way we ought to be. So it's a bearing with one another. Very similar to patience. Tolerance here means enduring the wrong and restraining oneself. Suffering the slight and maintaining unity by forgetting ourselves. And you are to do it in love. You are to do it in love, he says.

So here is one way to picture this house of unity that God makes. First of all, the foundation is the sound doctrine. We hold to the sound doctrines of the Gospel of sovereign grace and not only do we understand it, we have experienced it and it has changed us. Then on that foundation are those four pillars: humility, gentleness, patience and tolerance. Then above it all, overarching and covering all is the roof of love. It's this love we have. There is just something that happens to us in the new birth that causes us to love all of those others who have had the new birth. Now we do love all people. It helps us to love everybody, it really does. It helps me to love the Mormons. It helps me to love the Jehovah's Witnesses. It helps me to love everybody but there is a special, unique, energized love that is for the other saints of God who have experienced the same new birth I have experienced. The foundation is the doctrine. We have known it, we have experienced it. The pillars are humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance. Then the roof of love is over all. We are to do this in love. Love is the crown of the four pillars.

In summary of the love being the roof of the house of unity, we remind ourselves that love seeks the welfare of others and the good of the family of God. Love seeks the

welfare of others and the good of the family of God. Of course, this is the love that is placed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit matures this love and he stirs it up to action by using the word of God as it is preached, taught, studied, read, meditated on, whatever. Now, when a brother is out of sorts and he is not keeping the unity of the church, he is not following along, he is not honoring the church elders, he is finding problems all the time, I could say she, whoever, then what are we to do? We are to speak Scripture to them and the Scripture will be used by the Spirit of God to penetrate their hearts and convicts them and they'll get back on track. They will put these things back on again and say, "Yeah, you're right." I've seen that so many many times.

Let's remind ourselves that no unity is pleasing to God that's not the child of love. No unity is pleasing to God that is not the child of love. In other words, the love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ has changed us. That love creates this unity. It's a unity out of the love we have experienced and the love we walk in because he has changed us and he has loved us first.

Now he says to be diligent in verse 3, "being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." It means sometimes you have to work at it. You have to work at walking in this love. You have to work at putting on this humility, this gentleness, this patience, this tolerance.

Then very quickly, the architect and the builder of this house of unity is the Holy Spirit because he calls it there in verse 3, this is the unity of the Spirit. The Spirit is the author and the provision for our unity and this unity may be protected or it may be disturbed.

He uses the phrase here "in the bond of peace" also. I think this talks about our peace with God. The peace we have with God through this Gospel is the anchor that holds us to a pursuit of peace with each other. Once we have peace with God, then there is something, there is a grounding that enables me to want to have peace with my brothers and sisters in Christ. So we all have this common new birth experience, this conversion, so because of this unique new birth experience we have all experienced, this throws us together and reminds us that we have more in common than anything that our worldly or social lives may cause to separate us. So literally this is the bond of peace. Our peace with God is the bond which sticks all this together.

All of these things are the fruit of the Spirit's presence. Hatred, pride, contention, drives the Spirit away but his presence is the source and the condition of all that is good, but his absence is the source of all that is evil. Let me say that again, speaking of the Holy Spirit: his presence is the source of all that is good but his absence is the source of all that is evil. Which brings us to this conclusion: when someone is not walking in the Spirit, you cannot have tolerance of that or unity with them because of unity of the Spirit, and if they are grieving the Spirit and he is not active in their lives, then you can't have unity with them. You might get along with them. I'm not saying you beat them up. But there is no sweet, God-ordained, spiritual unity until somebody repents. And if they repent and walk in the Spirit like he's going to say over in Ephesians 5:18, be filled with the Spirit, it's an

imperative verb, it means keep on; it's a command, keep on being filled. You have to walk in Spirit-filling for this unity to be experienced in the body of Christ.

The house of unity, you see, is already built, we must choose to live there. God built the house, but we can choose to live there and walk in it. We must keep it and it must be maintained. So Paul waits all the way to chapter 4 before he gives us a direct exhortation and the very first thing he says is, "Here is what God is really concerned about and that is his local church is united together in spiritual unity." So that's why we just studied in small groups biblical conflict resolution again, and in a couple of years we will study it again, and in a couple of years we will study it again because Paul says number one on the list, make sure the church is in unity.

And again, as your preaching pastor, I so commend you. It doesn't happen often anymore but every now and then some dear person will join our church and decide that about everything we do is wrong and they were ordained of God to come and fix it, and they don't open a Bible and show us where we are violating Scripture. That's fine and I mean that, if you can show me in the book, I'm with you, not with me. Amen? But they are not real keen on that, they are more keen on, in a figure of speech, the divine revelation they were given to fix everything and they are not humble and they are not going along and they start causing or trying to cause, they haven't caused it but they are trying to cause disunity. And about the second person they talk to says this, "We don't do that here. If you've got a problem, if something is unbiblical, you can go and see one of our church elders and they will be glad to talk with you and I think if you're right, they will repent and fix whatever they need to fix." Then they will try one more. The same kind of response. They will try one more and say, "We don't do that here." Then all of a sudden I hear that they feel God is leading them to another church and do you know what? I 100% believe it was God that led them out of our church. And then bless their hearts, I hear that they are in another church and even though the pastor caters to them, they are a problem.

But thank you for being that kind of church. Sometimes a small group teacher may get out of line and need somebody to show them something, but you always ought to do that in privacy and with humility and with a compassionate spirit. Sometimes a pastor, I've gotten into the pulpit in recent days and said I said some things wrong and I have asked you to forgive me and correct those things. That doesn't bother me. I mean, this isn't about me, it's about the Lord. So that's always fine and good but thank you for being that kind of church because according to the Apostle Paul, that's way way high on God's list of what's valuable to him. By the way, we are all going to be in unity in heaven forever as his children. What he wants us to do is practice it down here to prove to the world we've got something the world doesn't have because they can't get along the way a true spiritual church can get along and love each other. Well, amen. The house of unity.